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A WILD GOOSE CHASE

by

EDWIN BALMER

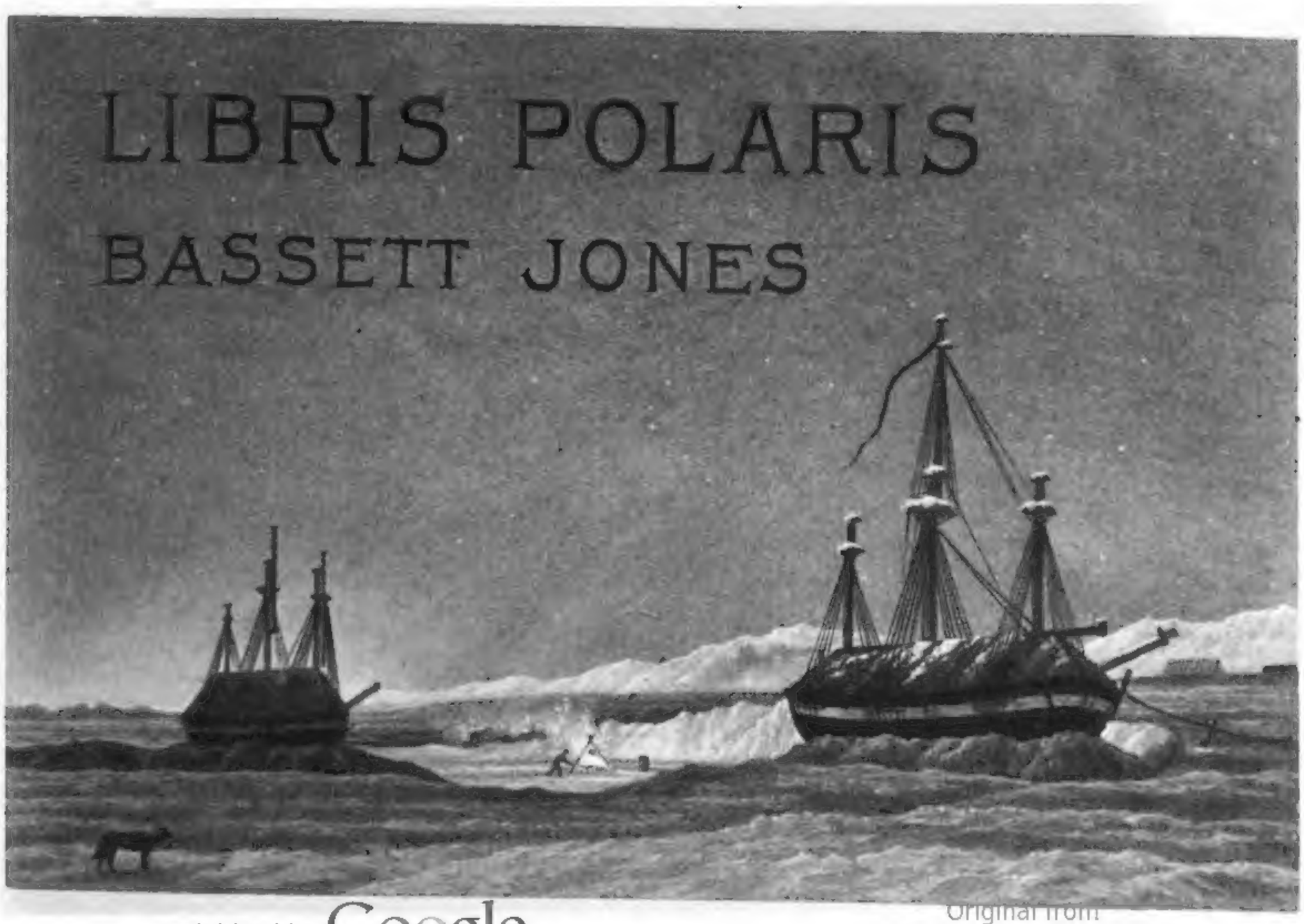
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"IT'S I—MARGARET!" NOW SHE CRIED TO HIM. "ERIC, OPEN YOUR EYES; LOOK AT ME!"

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A WILD-GOOSE CHASE

BY

EDWIN BALMER



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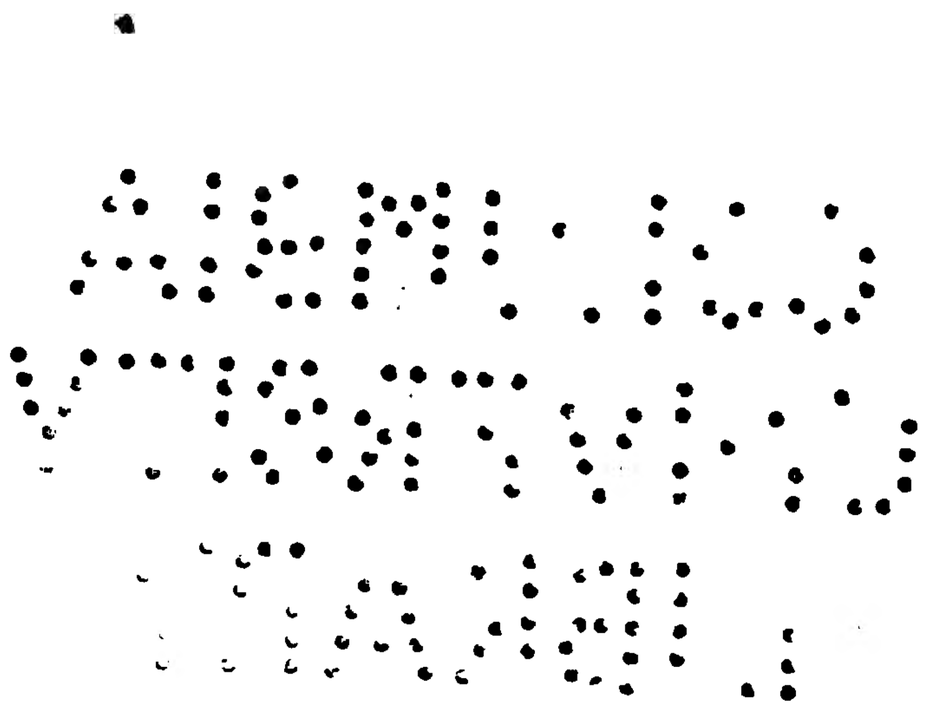
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To

MY WIFE

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A WILD-GOOSE CHASE

CHAPTER I

THE FLIGHT OF THE WILD GOOSE

THE crack of the hard ball against the smooth, echoing concrete walls of the racket court, the resound of the rapid volley, then the scorer's shout and the rattle of applause, carried into the club dressing rooms and told that a fast and interesting game was going on. "Who's playing?" Geoffrey Sherwood called from his dressing booth to the masseur who was waiting in the locker room outside.

"Mr. Latham, sir, against Evans."

"I see. Mr. Latham leading?"

"I should say so, sir."

Sherwood completed his change to light athletic shirt, flannel trousers and rubber-soled shoes, and went out to the lockers to unscrew his racket from the press.

"I'll tell Mr. Latham you're ready, sir?"

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the attendant then inquired. "He said he'd take on Evans only till you came." Evans was the club professional.

"No, not yet," Sherwood forbade. The echoing rattle of another fast volley came from the court and loud and appreciative applause again broke out. "There's quite a gallery there. I'll watch the match for a while."

He climbed the stairs to the spectators' seats set over the back wall of the court. Evans, the professional, was just returning viciously. The ball flew like a bullet against the front wall; as it came back the amateur leaped, met it and struck it back with his racket. Evans dipped for it desperately; it ricocheted past him to the rear wall. The professional made one more trial to get the ball as it bounded back from behind him; but it bounced again on the floor, once, twice, and Latham had won.

The row of spectators rose in a clamour of congratulation.

"Hello, Geoff!" Latham hailed carelessly. "Want to begin now?"

Several of the men looked at their watches and started for the stairs.

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"No, I'll see you do it once more," Sherwood decided. The men put back their watches and settled into their seats. The new game rushed on. Geoff Sherwood leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, following the triumph of his friend with the envy which a boy, just at his majority, holds toward a man ten years older who can beat him at almost any game.

There were few men of any age, either amateur or professional, who consistently could conquer Price Latham in any gentleman's sport, whether it was rackets in the downtown club in winter, polo in summer, or yacht racing or aeroplaning. Geoff had no need to envy his friend's lithe, strong and symmetrical figure; but Latham's perfect command of himself, his easy, effortless expenditure of strength —as now at this moment when suddenly he took his opponent entirely off guard and scored a brilliant "ace"—was Geoff's despair. So, as in worship he watched his hero, Geoff wondered again what in the world was wrong with his sister that she still clung to the memory of a man to whom she'd merely been engaged four years before, and who had been missing

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so long that he surely must be dead, when Price Latham wanted to marry her.

"Mr. Sherwood! Telephone call for Mr. Sherwood!" a bellboy announced.

Geoff went down to the booth. His sister was on the wire; she had been trying to find him all afternoon and just had learned he had come to the club. He answered her irritably as she told her news before he sensed the unusual excitement in her voice.

"What?" he asked. "Say that again; and please say it slower. What? What? . . . You're crazy, Margaret! . . . Oh, dear, you know I didn't mean that—I meant don't fool yourself again. . . . What? . . . Oh, all right; of course I'll come right away, and I'll be awfully glad for your sake if it's so."

He jerked open the booth door and went back to the racket court and waited beside the door to the players' floor till the cannonading inside ceased. Another game was over. Geoff opened the door. The professional, beaten again, stood puffing apologetically. Latham turned, his dark hair hardly damp.

"Ready, Geoff?"

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"Let me see you a minute, please, Price."

They crossed into the dressing rooms. "Margaret just called me up," the boy explained. "She thinks she's got some word or trace or something of Eric Hedon, Price."

"What—word of Hedon?"

"She couldn't, of course, but she's all worked up. Something's made her think he may be safe or was safe. She couldn't say much over the telephone. She wanted us to come out as soon as we could."

"Us?" Latham repeated doubtfully. "She asked for me?"

"I think so," Geoff assured vaguely. "Anyway, you'll come with me, won't you?"

Eric Hedon's name for almost two years had been written on the records of those who had given their lives for the mysteries of the North. He had been engineer and ethnologist with the *Aurora* expedition under Ian Thomas, which had gone north four years before to explore and map the last lands toward the Pole and to study the people of those most northern ice-bound islands not yet known to civilised men.

Seven men had made up the party which had

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sailed in the *Aurora* from New York in May, four years before, had taken Eskimos and dogs from Godhaven in Greenland in July, and then had been lost for two years till a Scotch whaler picked up survivors of the expedition near Cape Sabine, Ellesmere Land, where Greely's men had starved to death thirty years before.

McNeal, the sailing master, Brunton, second mate, Koehler, physician and meteorologist, and Linn, the cook, were the four white men who, with three Eskimos, had dragged themselves to the shores of Smith Sound. They told how the *Aurora* had been crushed in the polar ice pack north and west of Mason Land, and how when the pack had parted the ship had sunk. The seven white men and five Eskimos while making their way back over the ice had been parted by a lead. Mullin, the first mate, and two Eskimos and a sledge team had gone through new ice attempting to cross the lead and were drowned. It was known that Thomas and Hedon, with their dog team and sledge, were upon the young ice of the lead at the same time. They were not seen to break through, as were Mullin and the Eskimos; but it was cer-

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tain that neither of them crossed that lead. So either they must have returned to the polar pack and starved or been frozen, or in attempting to cross the lead they must have broken through and been drowned. The passing of months and then of years had made their loss a certainty.

Geoff reviewed this certainty again with himself as he finished dressing in the warm room by the baths. He jerked his tie irritably and went out. Margaret was worse than stupid and silly to keep on believing that Eric Hedon might yet be heard of. Geoff went down past the racket and squash courts to the elevator, and got off on the floor where Latham, who lived at the club, had his quarters.

He went into the man's room with the uncertain liberty of one who knows that he is being cultivated less for himself than for the sake of his sister.

"Sit down," Latham called cordially from the bedroom, where he was dressing. "You know where tobacco is. Papers just came in the mail there."

Geoff lounged luxuriously on the window

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seat and tore off the wrappers of the illustrated London weeklies just delivered. One of them contained an interesting article on the series of international polo matches projected and the possibility of Latham's this year playing by invitation with the American team in England. Latham's life was indeed the ideal one.

The mild April breeze was blowing in the open window and the clear blue sky and warm sunshine reminded one that winter was over. The club was one of those that stand on the lake front of Chicago, and from the windows of the floor where Latham had his rooms one sees only the blue lake to the east. A few white sails of small sporting craft already dotted the water beyond the great, grimy freighters streaming in and out from the harbour.

A flock of wild geese, bound back to the north after their winter flight to the shores of the gulf far below, sped over the lake. The two sportsmen in the club window looked after them, then descended to the street. Latham's roadster had been brought round to the door. They jumped in and drove north along the lake till they came to that part of the Lake

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Shore Drive, a few miles from the centre of the city, where great, handsome winter homes bound the beach, with here and there an apartment building, taller but no less handsome than the houses. Latham ran his car to the boulevard curb before one of these buildings. The two men went in together and ascended in the electric elevator to the floor where Geoff and his sister dwelt.

The large living room of the apartment, with its sun room overlooking the lake, plainly proclaimed itself as the dwelling of young people with many active interests. There were books, ornaments and pieces of furniture that told of a prosperous, cultured and vigorous older generation; but that generation had passed. It was represented directly only by a pair of quietly framed photographs of a date some three years before. Geoff's father and mother had been lost together in a train wreck; so he and his sister had lived there alone, governing themselves and each other after their own fashion.

The only person who could assert any claim to right of interference with them was then in

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the apartment. Geoff heard her voice, strident and severe, from the direction of Margaret's room.

"Cousin Clara is here," he commented to Latham.

However, she was concluding her interview with Margaret. A door opened.

"All I can say of you is that you're mad, more than mad," the stern voice repeated. "But I knew that before. You can make a match that any girl in her senses would have snapped up four years ago, and you—you persist in ——"

Cousin Clara hesitated to gather breath for her parting denunciation and incautiously stepped too far outside the door. The bedroom door quietly but firmly closed—it was not slammed, just closed—and the key quietly turned in the lock.

A woman in silk—a gown that indicated an age at least ten years younger than her obvious fifty years—came down the hallway in a rage attained only by one who, possessing much money, has been defied by one with less. Latham, knowing her as an ally, spoke sud-

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denly and loudly to Geoff to warn her that they were there. Immediately Cousin Clara controlled herself. Latham managed to turn about in surprise to see her.

"Mrs. Chandler!"

"I'm very glad that you're here, Price—and you, Geoffrey, if you can help your sister back to her senses."

"What's happened?" asked Geoff.

"More silliness about Hedon. "I'll leave her to tell you. But, Price Latham, I look to you to help me."

Latham bowed. A butler came through the dining room and stood by the front door. Cousin Clara went out. Down the hallway the key turned back the lock in Margaret's door, but the door remained closed. Geoff and Latham gazed at each other.

"Tell Miss Sherwood we're here," Geoff turned to the man.

"Yes, sir."

"No, wait. I guess I'd better get her myself. If you want anything, Price, tell Farley what it is."

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"Of course." Latham picked up a magazine and dropped into a chair.

Geoff went down the hall to his sister's room and rapped on the door, calling at the same time: "I say, Meg, it's I."

"Come in, Geoff."

"What the dickens were you getting Cousin Clara on her ear for again! And what is it about Eric Hedon?" he began belligerently as he entered.

Then he checked himself and quietly closed the door behind him.

His sister, as he understood vaguely from the manner of all men toward her, was an extraordinarily beautiful girl. At times Geoff admitted it. "One thing about Meg—I don't have to think anybody's after her for her chance at Cousin Clara's money."

For a girl she was not quite so tall proportionately as Geoff; and of course she was far slighter and more delicately formed. Yet one looking at the brother and sister would have said that the slender girl had at least as much power of endurance and nervous force as the athletic young man. She was not athletic at

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all; but she had been born with the knack of doing things easily, gracefully and well. One made this appraisal of Margaret Sherwood simultaneously with liking the fairness of her face, her deep, direct blue eyes, the glow of her cheek, the smile ever likely to light her full little lips, and the burnish of gold in the brown hair back from her white brow. She was twenty-four years old the month before.

She was sitting quietly beside her window, which looked over the water; at her feet was a large pasteboard box which, from the labels, had come by parcel post. She had opened it, but the cover was loosely laid on again. On the small table beside her she had pages of paper covered with handwriting, which Geoff recognised as the sheets of Eric Hedon's journal which McNeal and the others had brought back; and she was holding in one hand her best picture of Hedon.

She had not been crying during her interview with her father's cousin or afterward when she was alone; but now, as she turned to her brother, her lips trembled and her eyes filled.

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"Geoff, I don't know what to think. Brother, tell me what to think!" she appealed.

"Why, little Meg!" He bent beside her, one arm about her. "What's come?"

"That came!" she said, pointing to the box on the floor. "Just as I was going out this afternoon that came."

Geoff stooped and took off the cover and parted the paper wrappings inside. Below lay a white, soft mass of feathers—it filled the box—a large, white bird with web feet and broad bill, and with the gamy, fishy odour of the wild fowl. He took it from the box and looked at it.

"A goose!" he said wonderingly. "A wild goose!"

"Yes," she said. "That's it—a wild goose!"

"What about it, Margaret?"

"It was shot in Louisiana the day before yesterday."

"Well?"

"An old man shot it—an honest old man I've no doubt—an old negro. He brought it to the old gentleman—one of the fine old Southern gentleman—who had been his master."

"Brought what, Meg?"

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"The goose he shot—that goose."

"All right; what about it? Why did it come to you?"

"He sent it."

"Yes, but why?"

"It's an arctic goose, Geoff."

"Arctic?"

"Yes, the white wild goose of that kind. They're arctic. Eric told me about them once. I was sure I remembered. Besides, I looked it up just now." She motioned toward her shelf of books upon the Arctic. "They breed in summer above the Arctic Circle, Geoff, in the islands in the Arctic Ocean almost to the Pole. When winter comes there they fly south to the Gulf shores. This one was in Louisiana when it was shot."

"I see," said Geoff impatiently.

"He found this bound to its leg!" She held a hand toward her brother, but with fingers still firmly closed over the treasure they concealed. "You can see on the right leg there where it was bound. It looks as if it had been bound there when the bird was alive, doesn't

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it, Geoff; as if it had been there a long time while the bird was alive?"

He looked at the bird's leg to please her. There were marks upon it, indeed, as though something had been bound about the leg; but for how long he could not tell.

"Yes," he assured her. "Of course."

"This was there!" She unclenched her fist and showed him a tiny scrap of something which looked like oiled silk. He took it and saw that there was a series of perforations through it, making tiny letters which spelled words; and, feeling in his hands the tingle which one feels when fancying he sees another long supposed to be dead, he held the scrap to the light and read the characters.

"Send to Margaret Sherwood," he read. Then followed the address at which Margaret had been four years before. "Both reached Mason Land. Safe. Eric Hedon."

It was dated in August of the summer before.

Geoff looked up at his sister, still tingling.

"What came with that?"

"That's oiled silk, you see, pricked through

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with a needle or pin or something. They took that material to cover records which might get wet. It was wound up and tied to the bird's leg. It could have come down from the Arctic so; I know it could."

"What came with it?" Geoff repeated.

"Oh, this. It came by post this morning; the box with the bird came this afternoon. Of course I couldn't make anything out of it till the box came, then I tried to telephone you all over town. But I couldn't find you till you went to the club."

Geoff took the letter which she extended. It was a square, ordinary envelope bearing the postmark, dated two days before, of a small Louisiana town near the Gulf. It was addressed in the careful, courtly characters of an old man. Geoff took out the inclosure and read:

"Miss (or Mrs.) Margaret Sherwood.

"DEAR MADAM: A darky of mine, Sam Negus, went goose shooting in the marshes about here to-day and brought back fourteen geese of two varieties. When he was showing

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them to me I noted an unusual appendage attached to the leg of one.

"Though I cannot judge of the matter, I have acted upon the possibility that the message upon the bird might be of concern to you, and accordingly I rewrapped it as nearly in the manner in which I found it as I was able to recollect.

"I take pleasure in forwarding to you, separately, the bird as brought to me.

"Sincerely your servant,

"ROBERT MASSEY."

Geoff turned the letter over slowly. His sister bent toward him tensely; then he looked up at her and for a moment she met his eyes. She looked away from him and, gazing out her window, suddenly she put her hand on her brother's shoulder and seized him.

"Before you say anything, look out there!" she pointed. "Look out there!"

He followed her direction in wonder. The blue, smooth expanse of the great lake lay warming in the spring sun after the winter's cold; a faint, irridescent film of evaporation

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shimmered up from the surface. An intake crib for the city's water supply, with the light-house above it, a few steamers and one or two of the tiny sail boats dotted the blue of the water; but it was none of these toward which Margaret stared.

Then he saw what it was—a long, faint V-shaped series of dots in the air, sweeping swiftly, steadily, evenly up from the south, passing over the ships below them as though the vessels were anchored and as motionless as the crib, flying on easily, exhaustlessly, altering the shape of their V to the cross of an X and shifting in formation back to V again—before, in barely a hundred breaths, the wild geese from the Gulf far away in the south slipped out of sight on their swing back to their summer breeding places on the shores of the arctic islands about the North Pole.

"What are distance and open water in the Arctic to them?" the girl asked. "In two days, or three at most, they may reach the last lands of the north; and we know that some of them do, and swing south again and then back in the summer to their tundra. They fly each year by

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thousands, by tens and hundred of thousands, up to the islands almost to the pole. A few might have been netted there or snared and then let go; and this one, at least, might have been shot in the south."

She looked down again to the wild bird in the box.

Her brother shook his head. "It is not possible!" he convinced himself. "No, it's not."

"You mean no one can tell! You can't! It's all so wonderful you don't know yourself what to think."

Geoff gathered up the box and carefully took the little scrap of waterproof silk and the letter.

"Price is here," he explained. "He came with me. He's got good sense. Let's talk it over with him."

"I'll come in a minute," Margaret said; and her brother went out.

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CHAPTER II

ERIC HEDON

MARGARET delayed over putting away the articles which reminded her of Eric Hedon. She knew it was not because of what the bird had brought that she believed Eric alive; she never at any time had allowed herself to think of him as dead.

If one has become accustomed to consider a missing person as dead one cannot think of that person's doing things; but if one pictures him as lost but still living, one can always look for word to come from him. No one knew better than Margaret Sherwood that most of the men long missing in the Arctic never return. She knew that theirs were the forms in the hewn graves in the ever-frozen ground with the lonely cairns of stone and the driftwood crosses above them buried by the blizzards of winter; theirs were the bones bleaching on the barrens never reached by another man; theirs

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were the bodies lying in the deep of the Arctic Ocean, ever to rest beside the thong-tethered teams of dogs and the sledges that broke through the young sea ice with them.

Yet she also knew that many men had remained unreported for a longer time than Ian Thomas and Eric Hedon and still had returned to civilisation safe at last. There were Greely's men, three-fourths of whom starved to death on their barren cape of Ellesmere Land, but seven finally were found alive by a relief ship; scores of others had come back after suffering disasters which it seemed they could not have survived.

Of course the explorers entering the Arctic in the last two years had made inquiry and search for the missing men. Rewards had been offered to whalers for information of the fate of Thomas and Hedon, rewards which Margaret herself had increased up to her means. Though these had brought her no news, the passing of the months still sustained her expectancy; nothing seemed able to destroy her hope.

Faith that Hedon must return to her seemed supplied to her as a need of her life.

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When she thought of her dependence upon Eric, sometimes it astonished her, as it always surprised others, to realise the power of her love for him. She never had heard of him till four years before; it was purest chance that they had met at all. Ian Thomas had been a friend of her father's; they had roomed together at a little Eastern college. Margaret went with her father and mother to dinner with Mr. Thomas a week before she was to sail with friends for France and a summer in Brittany. She was a very young girl then, just twenty. Ian Thomas met them in the hall as they arrived at his home.

"I'm keeping a young fellow who called on me this noon. He wants to go with me on the *Aurora* to the Arctic next month."

"As what?" Margaret's father inquired.

"He's offered to go as cook, seaman, mate or anything; he doesn't care," Mr. Thomas laughed. "And I don't care much either, as long as he goes with me. Come and look at him."

Mr. Thomas led them to his library, which was dark except for the blaze from the log fire

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flaming on the hearth. He did not turn on the electric light as he entered and he motioned to Margaret and her father and mother to come in quietly as he pointed to the figures on the floor before the fire.

A young man, whose straight shoulders and well poised head made a silhouette before the fire, was sitting on the hearth rug, his back to the door. A little boy of six—one of Ian Thomas's nephews—lay on the rug with his chin in his hands looking up at the young man; another little boy sat on the other side and before the three lay Thomas' collie. The young man was telling a story; and a wholly absorbing story it was to him as well as to his hearers. His voice was low but eager and his hands gestured now as he spoke; and suddenly, breaking from his narration, he sang softly, excitedly a strange, plaintive song—something which made Margaret, though she had just stolen close and had been able to make out hardly a dozen words of the story, see before her a circle of simple, primitive huts in a warm valley of sago and palm with a painted priest droning before the people prostrate in fear before

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thunder and lightning breaking upon the mountain overhead; then suddenly, the storm was gone, the sun was coming out and the people rising, smiling and happy. For the song ended and with it, the story.

The children stared up at the teller for a moment, still in the spirit and swing of the song; they had not yet come back from the village in the jungle valley; and perhaps the young man himself had not; but the dog before him looked up and past him. The young man turned around and leaped to his feet. The children came to themselves too and caught at him demanding, "Tell us that one again! Oh, that's only the first time you told that; and that song's the best of all! You've got to tell us that again!"

But their uncle switched on the light, took the boys in charge and sent them home. Margaret found herself unable merely to nod in acknowledgment as her host said, "Margaret, this is the new member of the *Aurora* party, Eric Hedon." Love at first sight—that, at her self-confident age of twenty, she had put down as an impossibility in a discussion with

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her most intimate friend only a few days earlier; but now, as she stood observing this stranger, a completely irrational in explicable impulse disconcerted her; she was conscious that her heart was pounding, colour was coming to her cheeks and forehead and, as Eric Hedon spoke to her, she offered him her hand and seemed to herself actually to seize his, as she said:

"Will you tell me all of that story and sing that song again with me in the dark before the fire sometime? I mean—I mean—" she stammered as she realised what she had said. "It should be told that way, shouldn't it?"

His fingers in hers did not linger an instant too long or press upon hers differently because she had thus forgotten herself. "It is the storm song of the Suwanese of the mountains of southern Sumatra," he replied to her simply. Not only his words but his tone accepted her attraction as having been solely to the song and not to him at all. And the next moment—after this display of herself which must have made her flee instantly from another man—

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she was cool and at ease beside Eric Hedon as they all went to dinner.

He was of just the height she liked in a man; he was quite as tall, if not taller, than Price Latham; but she discovered that, while she always was conscious of gazing up when she looked at Price, this man somehow spared her that feeling. At the table, where he was placed beside her, he did not consider it necessary to turn to her with each remark or reply and she took opportunity to study him.

He was not handsome in the definite, striking manner of Price Latham or of other men she often saw; but she wonderfully liked Eric Hedon's looks. He had firm lips, sensitive but with strength, a good nose and chin; his eyes—deep blue and always direct and expressive—particularly delighted her. His face was tanned brown and his hands also; these were excellently formed, well kept, unmanicured. The sun and exposure which had darkened his skin, had bleached his hair, but it was naturally light and bespoke, like his name, a descent from the boldest blood of northern Europe. A shield, a sword and an iron cap, Margaret said

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to herself, and he'd be a Viking. But for five generations his family had been American.

He told this in reply to a question from Margaret's mother as he also explained that, for most of the last five years, he had been "looking up" little known tribes in the interior of Brazil, in Papua and in Thibet and Nepal as field ethnologist for American societies. His hope in going to the Arctic was chiefly to come upon some settlements of Eskimos still in their primitive state before contact with civilised people.

Working as a field ethnologist—that explanation seemed to mean more to Margaret's parents than to her—evidently was not remunerative. For Margaret now saw that his grey suit, which seemed to look so well when she first saw him, actually was nearly threadbare and bore the marks of many careful mendings. She glanced across the table after she had discovered this and saw that her mother had noted it too. And Margaret realised better now the trend of the inquiries from her people. She had displayed impulsive liking of this stranger upon meeting him and, during dinner, she had

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shown that her attraction to him was continuing; so her mother was setting herself immediately to the proper task of ascertaining whether he was one who safely might be considered by a young girl. Margaret warmed with indignation when her mother's glance, after failing to find lack in Eric Hedon, seemed to direct Margaret to the faults in his well worn suit.

He, apparently, was completely unconscious of any particular scrutiny; he seemed simply to fear that, in his replies regarding himself, he might have exaggerated his account in the world.

"I don't mean that during all the last five years I've been regularly employed, Mrs. Sherwood. One doing my sort of work has to —and ought to want to—do a great deal of it on his own account. Even the Smithsonian Institution which sent me to Papua, and the American Museum of Natural History, which helped out expenses in Nepal, can't do all they would wish for every one. Usually some such institution or university or society is bequeathed a sum or appropriates a few thousand dollars for study of some primitive peo-

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ple or for exploring some unknown place to find whether people are there and what sort they may be. Then, perhaps, I'm sent for and I'm given the money or the credit which has to cover everything—ship passage, film and photographic supplies, and things of that sort and also expenses of publication of what you bring back with you. So it's pretty much put up to the man in the field to figure how long he can stay at work, if he can't make money for one year keep him for two and let him cover twice the area he hoped to looked at."

"And that is the way you are planning to go into the Arctic?"

"Yes. If I can get myself north, as now it appears I can," Eric smiled to his host, "I'm promised enough to buy dogs and gear and supplies to let me look for the people I want to find and stay with them and study them."

"You mean, Mr. Hedon, you are going to give the next two years, while the *Aurora* will be in the Arctic, just for the cost of Eskimo dogs and supplies there?"

"Mr. Thomas has been given only his ship and expenses and pay for the crew, hasn't he?"

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"Of course; but he—" Margaret's mother checked herself but she could not prevent her glance from referring to the comfortable furnishings of the room and then returning to Eric's coat. Margaret's hand moved toward his on the table.

"I think your work is perfectly splendid, Mr. Hedon!" she cried. "I would rather do your work and work in your way than do anything else I know!"

She brought the blood hot to his cheeks by that as hers warmed too when he turned to her in gratitude. And from that impulsive approval and defence of Eric, she never was shaken.

She met plenty of opposition. Her mother saw it would be a mistake to refuse to invite Eric to her house; on the contrary, she invited him cordially. She believed that Margaret, by seeing him often, would soon appreciate that, while nothing could be said against Eric, he was not situated to become more than an interesting acquaintance. He indeed was almost penniless. He was the son of a medical missionary, stationed at Samoa when Eric was

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born and later in the interior of China. Eric's mother died there. After the American occupation of the Philippines his father was sent as deputy administrator of a difficult, dangerous portion of a province in the mountains of Mindanao. There were seldom any white people in the district but Eric and his father who was held responsible for the good health and conduct of twenty-five thousand Moros. Eric's father had the knack of making friends with all sorts of people and he and Eric travelled safely through the mountains, stopping at the villages as the guests of the native chiefs. Eric alone happened to be visiting one of the most powerful chiefs when a scientific party of importance, under the escort of soldiers, came into the district. The natives surrounded the expedition and began an attack; Eric had the confidence of the chief sufficiently so that he was able to halt the attack; and after the truce, the soldiers returned unharmed to the coast and the scientists remained in the mountains for a month under the protection of the chief and as his guests until they had completed their work.

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Eric described that month as the greatest of his life. He had been fascinated, during his stay in the native villages, by the customs he observed, the legends and lore and superstitions told him and by the ideas and strange philosophies of life which controlled the primitive people. He had spent much time making notes of such things; but he had not imagined that this interest could lead him into work of account until now he found famous and honoured men come to those mountains to see what he had been viewing in the life of the villages and to learn from the people what they had begun to confide to him. The ethnologist of the party spent a good deal of time explaining to him the meaning and value of the incidents and characteristics which Eric had noted. The scientists invited him to accompany them when their work in the vicinity was over. They finally brought Eric to Washington where he prepared, with help of men at the Smithsonian Institution, for the work he had been doing ever since.

This never had involved him in a wish for money for himself till now. So dismay sur-

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prised him with the realisation of his position as their friendship became more and more important to Margaret and to him. For the first few days, he sought her at every opportunity and she let him see that she offered the opportunities as often as she could; then he knew that mere friendship could not continue between them and suddenly one evening, instead of his appearance at the house or his voice over the telephone, there came a short note—which in its very brevity betrayed much—saying good-bye to her. He had been called away for a few days on an important matter and he would not return to Mr. Thomas' or to the city until after she had left for Europe. He could not well express his appreciation of her companionship.

He sent with the note a flower pot containing a tulip from Sumatra—the extraordinarily beautiful and sweet-smelling flower of which he had once told her; he had found a bulb among his things.

That day Margaret decided finally that she was not going away. She did not try to deceive herself or her mother as to why she deter-

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mined to stay. Her mother accused her, "Margaret! You are refusing to go away on account of Eric Hedon!"

She admitted quietly, "Yes, Mother; I care more about being with him than about anything else." And she would not go. So, when Eric returned to the Thomases, he found her; and he could not again pretend reason for going away.

It was more than a fortnight later that Eric left for the *Aurora* at New York. Margaret did not see him or hear from him in the morning of the last day or in the afternoon till she stole over late "to say good-bye to Mr. Thomas."

Eric was in the library with the others, listing up the supplies already aboard the *Aurora* and the remainder still to be expected. Margaret joined them and for a few moments worked with them over the lists; then she and Eric were alone. Mrs. Thomas had disappeared and her husband had vanished with her, and the doors were closed. Margaret and Eric stood side by side at the table over which were strewed the accounts, bills and invoices of

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the supplies for the Arctic. Eric had in his hand an invoice which he had been checking up and Margaret had been comparing with another. A moment before, his hand had been steady; he had even been able to meet her eyes once and again. Now the sheet he held trembled so that the figures were illegible though both pretended to study them.

She was the first to move. She took hold of the sheet as though to stop its shaking, then her fingers touched his. The paper dropped and he seized her hand.

"Yes, Eric," she looked at him now, "why do we pretend?"

He released her fingers and stood away in his dismay. "Margaret; I love you! Oh, I love you! And you know it!"

"Yes. I love you! You know that too!"

"But you should not!"

"Should not?"

"Margaret, you must not!"

"Love you, dear? I cannot help it."

"But nothing can come of it!"

"Of our love, anything can come, Eric!"

It brought him to his knees, frightened be-

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fore her. He seized her hands and held them to his cheeks. "I have tried to think it out, Margaret. Over and over again, I have tried to think it out. I don't know of anything I could do at which I could expect to make money."

"To make money!" she cried. "Look at me, Eric! Look at me or I will kneel down too! There! Now what were you saying? What were you saying to me?"

"A man who loves and has love from a girl has to have money, dear. I haven't thought I had to have much money; Margaret, I know you well enough for that. But if we must love, we must marry and live. And if I give up my work to do something just to make money—"

"You wouldn't be you, dear, and I wouldn't marry you. If you did that and I let you do it to be married, we'd never be happy together."

"Then," he appealed to her; "then, Margaret, what is there for us?"

"We haven't got to know now, dear! At least, I haven't! You love me and I love you. Isn't that more than enough for us now? . . . To-morrow you're going into the Arctic to be

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gone a long time—at least two years, Eric! You ought to go; I want you to go, for it is about your work. So all we need to know tonight, dear, is just that we love; and now we've said it. So I know that you'll be going away only to come back to me; and you will know that no matter how long you are gone or whatever happens or whoever else comes or whatever any one says or does while you are away, I will be waiting for you!"

"You will be waiting for me!"

"For you, always, forever! . . . So kiss me now, Eric; Put your arms about me . . . Dear! Dear! Oh, Eric, how far away you're going and how long it will be! But—but you'll come back to me, won't you? For however long it is, you'll find me waiting for you!"

So she had given herself to Eric Hedon that evening. Later that night, he started away for the *Aurora* and she heard from him by letter only a few times before the Arctic engulfed him.

She told her father and mother the next morning what she had promised to do. They received the announcement complacently.

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Eric would be gone two years; long before that time she would come to her senses; Price Latham or some one like Price would bring her into her right mind.

Mrs. Chandler, upon whom had devolved the responsibility of Margaret's future, after the death of her parents, simply refused to discuss any possibility of Margaret's marrying Hedon, should he ever return. Geoff, too, was openly against her; and Price always seemed confident that he needed only a little more patience with her to make her completely forget her foolish infatuation.

Yet during four years, Margaret had refused to forget. She made no display of loyalty to Eric; only in her room she preserved the keepsakes and trifles connected with Eric which, now after Geoff was gone, she took up tenderly and put away. The blood red, tropical tulip which he had given her was blooming in its pot on her windowsill; it had a deep, sweet odour. She had found it flowering the morning after he went away and it had blossomed during every spring since. She stooped and smelled the flower with her eyes closed.

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The odour always associated itself with the feeling of her parting with Eric.

It brought back the sound of his voice as he spoke seriously to her, then his laugh and the light in his eyes. For an instant she seemed to feel the strength of his arm about her and now the final wild warmth of his lips against hers.

Gently she touched the blossom with her cheek; then she straightened. Bathing her eyes, she went from her room and down the hall to the living room, where her brother and Price were waiting for her.

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CHAPTER III

THE BARGAIN MARGARET MADE

SHE saw as she entered that they had discussed the matter of the message between them and were prepared to oppose her. Yet for what she had determined to do she must have help; and if she could not get it from them she did not know where help was to be had. Latham rose as she came in and met her pityingly.

"I'd have given a good deal if that could have been prevented." He looked from her to the box which was on the table.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Of course when you offered rewards for information of Hedon and kept on advertising you courted a miserable trick like that. Sooner or later it was bound to come. Perhaps we're lucky that we've had so little of it."

"I see," Margaret met him. "You think that message is all a fraud."

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"I think it ingenious, very. The real possibility of the thing being genuine—the plausibility, one almost might say—is what makes it so monstrously villainous."

"The character of the letters, even in perforations that would wear out a little, are like Eric's, Price."

"Who hasn't been supplied with facsimiles of Hedon's writing to imitate in some such way?" Latham returned. "Since the *Aurora* was lost, every Sunday screamer in the country has been filled with the personal details of the party."

"The address is not the address we have now," Margaret persisted. "You see, the post office forwarded it. Mr. Massey took my address from Eric's message; that was the address at which we lived when the *Aurora* sailed."

Latham shook his head. "The man who was clever enough to frame up that fraud and use that bird to make a couple of thousand dollars wouldn't have slipped on the detail of your address at the time the *Aurora* left."

"But he asks for no money, Price. He

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doesn't even know who I am or what the message is about."

"You mean he pretends not to. I admit it is a mighty good fraud."

"I don't believe it's a fraud, Price!"

"You mean you won't, Margaret!"

"Why should I?"

"You know it." Latham moved nearer her. "Margaret, I would have given anything, I said, if you could have been spared this. It is too monstrous, too brutal. Eric Hedon is dead, and you know in your heart he is."

"No, I don't. That's just it—I know in my heart he's alive!"

Latham recoiled. "Then your head must know better," he corrected. "He's lost. Every man who was north with him is sure of it. Every man has told you so. It's not necessary to question whether or not you would have been happy with Hedon. He is lost. Since you loved him—or believed you did—it was right for you to wait as long as you have. But now to have this fraud start you to hoping and expecting again and waiting—I can't let you."

"I'm not going to wait any longer!"

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"What?"

"I'm going to do something now!"

"Margaret!"

"I'm going to send a ship up north with a search party to do nothing else but look for him—for them, for Eric and Mr. Thomas!"

Latham turned from her to Geoff helplessly.

"What in the world are you talking about?" her brother demanded of her.

"I'm going to do what I ought to have done two years ago; and now I won't put it off any longer."

Latham lighted a cigarette. "Surely before even talking over this mad idea any further you're going to prove up on that." He jerked toward the box with the wild bird.

"Of course."

"All right, Geoff. Look up the trains. I'll start south to-night."

"No; please don't, Price," Margaret interposed. "You're awfully good, and I thank you very much; but I'd rather you wouldn't."

"Me, then?" asked Geoff.

"No; you'd be the same as Price."

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"What do you mean by that?" Latham demanded.

"You wouldn't go to Louisiana to find out whether or not that message might be genuine. You'd go down there determined to prove it wasn't—both of you."

"You're going, then?"

"No; I'm going to get to my real work right away. I'll have to send some one else."

"Who?"

"Any one you pay for that sort of work."

"Then if it's a fraud—as it is—you surely will pay for it."

"I'd be glad to."

"What are you saying?"

"Price—and you, Geoff—please don't bother about my being fooled or about that message being a fraud. I'm going to try to find out for my own satisfaction whether it is or not; but even if I found a man who admitted writing that message and preparing the trick and sending it to me in that way, still I'd pay him something. For that message, real or not, is going to make me do the only thing that can possibly make me satisfied afterward. I don't

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know whether Eric wrote that message or not; but I believe he might have. I believe he's alive somewhere up in the Arctic. And I'm not going to give him up till I've got the old *Aurora* men together again and a ship to send them back to the north, to stay there till they can bring back Eric and Mr. Thomas or bring me back greater certainty that they are dead."

Latham snapped his cigarette impatently.

"How can there be greater certainty that they are dead after four years or after ten than after two?" he said. "If they went through the ice into the sea the way Mullin did—and every one who came back believes that they did—a thousand search parties couldn't bring back more assurance."

"But if they were not lost in the lead; if they got back to the ice pack and went through the winter and then somehow reached the land—Grinnell Land or somewhere—and are waiting for us to try to reach them, believing we wouldn't give them up; suppose that is the case and we made no more effort to reach them."

"I can't suppose that," Latham returned

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coldly. "Nor can any one else. How are you going to get your ship?" he inquired.

"I can raise the money."

"Where?"

"I can promise my income to some one who'll give me what I need!"

"No, you can't," Latham denied. "You must excuse me, Margaret, but I've got to be plain and sensible to stop you from this foolishness. I know your circumstances, of course. You've a good income, you and Geoff; but it's an income which your father left in trust, as I understand it, as an income. You can't touch a penny of the principal, either of you; you can't assign it or borrow money on it any way. No note you'd give assigning an income from it to any one would be legal. Those are the conditions of the trust. It's almost as if your father foresaw some such plan as you propose, and was determined to prevent it. You can't borrow even a fraction of the money you would need to fit out an Arctic expedition."

"And you've already struck Cousin Clara, haven't you?" Geoff guessed. "I wager she gave you an answer!"

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The girl admitted it by her silence. "Still I'll find some one who'll send a ship, and if I don't I'll never give up Eric—never, never!"

Latham came closer to her and met her eyes directly. "I believe you," he said. "I believe you. So I'll send a ship, Margaret!"

"Price!" she cried.

Geoff turned toward Latham in his astonishment.

"Go into the billiard room a minute, will you, Geoff?" Latham requested. "I want to say something to Margaret."

The brother looked at the two silently and went out.

"What is it, Price?" Margaret appealed. "You said you'd send a ship!"

"I will—for your sake and my own."

"For yours too?"

"Margaret!" He came to her and took her hands and gazed down at her, his eyes opposite hers. "You know that what's for your sake is also for my own. I love you; I've loved you for years. You know that. I must continue to love you. If you won't give up Hedon till

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a ship goes up into the Arctic for him, I'll send that ship. I'll go on it myself."

He could feel her wrists becoming tense in his grasp. The fire in her eyes burned deeper and her lips trembled, but she still met him directly.

"Go on!" she said. "I heard that. You said you'd take up a ship to search for Eric. Go on; under what conditions?"

"Under the simple conditions that if the expedition reaches and searches the lands which he must have reached if he and Thomas are alive, and then does not find him or discover proof that he is alive, he becomes to you what he is—dead."

"You mean more than that!" Margaret faced him. "You mean that if you do not find him I shall marry you!"

"Yes." He held her close before him. "I do mean that."

"And if I agree to that there will be no delay? The ship will be ordered at once and will start in time to be sure to get into the Arctic this summer?"

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"I'll wire to-night to charter any ship you say."

"Price! You understand I don't love you!"

"I'm doing this because I know as soon as you get Eric Hedon out of your mind you will love me!"

She fought herself free from his grasp and, turning from him, looked down intently. Before her she saw Eric and his companion in the north—two men alone on a barren land, starving, desolate, dying, one of them at least still smiling, cheerful, looking day after day for signs of a ship coming up from the south.

She turned back. "I accept," she said quietly to Latham.

"You mean you promise?"

"But I, too, have one condition, Price!"

"Condition?"

"That I am the one to be satisfied, fairly, that Eric is dead. If I am to give myself for this ship into the north, I must go on it; and I must be sure that Eric is lost—if we don't find him. You are sure he is dead already."

"You go upon the ship, Margaret?"

"I must."

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"Into the Arctic?"

"Wherever Eric may be."

Latham gazed at her. Again he put his hands out and this time seized her shoulders and held her.

"Then it's a bargain?" he asked her almost fiercely.

"If I go upon the ship, yes."

"All right!" He drew his breath in deeply. "I'll take you!"

Geoff, in the billiard room, was knocking the balls about viciously, and in the process jammed off the tips from two cues before Latham joined him.

"I'm going to send a ship up to look for Thomas and Hedon," the man said as he came in.

"The devil you are!"

"And I'm going on it, Geoff."

"What?"

Latham repeated his statement as he chalked a cue deliberately.

Geoff gasped. "And give up your polo in England? Price, the *Graphic* says you're the

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first player in your position in the country. And I thought I was going with you too!"

"You can go with me if you want into the Arctic—in fact, I believe you're rather counted on."

"No!"

"Yes, for you sister's going."

Geoff stared. "Meg?"

"You might go see her."

Geoff rushed from the room.

"Good Lord!" Dazedly he joined Price a quarter of an hour later.

"Well—going?" asked Latham.

"Going? Sure I'm going. Entirely aside from the requirements of the position—decencies and all that—I've got to go. Sister going up into the Arctic while brother stays at the golf club. I witness myself surviving that. They'd cartoon me in curls. Confound girls anyway! Price, why the devil are you doing it for her anyway?"

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CHAPTER IV

THE SHIP CHARTERED

FOR whatever reason Latham was doing it, Geoff soon found that he was proposing to do it thoroughly. That evening a man left for Louisiana to investigate Robert Massey; but Margaret awaited neither his report nor his return. Latham had left her authority to charter any ship, engage any men and make any other arrangements she considered best.

"I always knew I was going to send a ship north. I guess I knew I must go with it," she admitted to Geoff as they were at work at home that night. She had been busy for hours with letters, telephone, telegrams.

In her address book were the present whereabouts of the four men who had come back from the *Aurora*. McNeal, the sailing master, was in England. She cabled him, offering command of another ship. Brunton, the second mate, was on a whaling vessel in Alaska.

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She wired an agent at Nome to find him and furnish him funds for return to the States. Koehler, who had been physician and meteorologist with Thomas' party, was in a department at Washington; and Linn, the cook, was in the navy. She wrote to both of them, and at the same time to a senator and a cabinet officer who could arrange for their leave for an expedition to the North. Then Margaret revealed herself to her brother more astonishingly.

"Von Moltke, with his plan for the Franco-Prussian war all rolled up and ready to hand out when they woke him to say war was declared, certainly had little on you," Geoff admitted, as she proceeded with her arrangements.

In the book in which she kept the addresses of the survivors of the *Aurora* expedition also was the name, together with notes of the condition and equipment, and newspaper clippings giving other data, of every ship recently returned from arctic work or available for it. Also the addresses of agents, owners and other persons to be corresponded with had been copied down and kept up to date. The Danish

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exploration ship *Vibork,* at Copenhagen after completing work about Northern Greenland, seemed to be the best ship.

"Aside from matters of expense, the small ship and the small party have done the most in the Arctic recently," Margaret reminded.

The *Viborg* was of about seventy tons register, of the same size as the *Aurora* and a little larger than the *Gjoa,* in which Amundsen in three years accomplished the Northwest Passage. It was sloop rigged and had a gasoline auxiliary engine; the hull had been built and braced for work in ice. There were two or three of its crew who might be engaged again. Cables were sent to them and to the agents of the boat.

Margaret had copied or pasted into her book every important list of supplies and equipment that the different expeditions had taken. She went over these lists that night to see what must be ordered immediately.

"But then polar expeditions in these days have regular suppliers. You've really only got to send word to the right man and tell him where you want to go and how long you expect

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to be there, and he'll quote you a price for the entire outfit. We'll get our dogs in Greenland, of course. The *Aurora* people, on their way back, left theirs at Godhaven. We must be in Greenland in June; in July is our chance to get through Melville Bay, if we've luck with the ice."

So at two o'clock, when Geoff at last turned in, the voyage to the Arctic was a settled affair. He lay awake wondering about it and thinking of the complete change in his immediate future which had been worked so swiftly. If he was to go—as he certainly would if Margaret persisted—he had better be a leader rather than a follower. At eleven the next morning he met Latham at the country club to run their ponies for the first practice over the soggy field. Some other men were out and they divided into fours and ran through two rapid, rough periods; but as Geoff went back to the dressing room, bruised and shaken from two hard tumbles and strained from riding off heavier men, for the first time he took no great pride in his daring and endurance.

"I say, Price," he confided to Latham,

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"looks like we're going to the Arctic all right. Makes a polo tumble feel rather petty, eh?"

"Then Margaret's going through with it, is she?" asked Latham.

"Through with it? She's got down to planning the frills—our Christmas dinner, and a present for each man if we get caught in the ice and have to stay there through the winter."

The next day the man who had been sent to Louisiana wired a report that neither proved nor disproved the authenticity of the message brought by the arctic goose. But already the *Viborg* was chartered, half the crew engaged, and the date of departure for the north definitely set.

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CHAPTER V

CAPE FAREWELL

THE Arctic continent of Greenland stretches down from Peary Land, which is the most northerly land known to exist, more than sixteen hundred miles to the south to Cape Farewell, which has been known to white men longer than any other land in the western half of the world.

More than a thousand years ago—the exact date is 872—King Harold, The Fairhair, of Norway, fought in the fiord of Hafurs one of the great decisive naval battles. He fought the jarls, or independent princes of his land, in a battle of viking against viking, at a time when the flaxen-haired men of the North were the mightiest warriors of Europe, when they harried at will the coasts of France, England and the Baltic and held broad duchies and kingdoms under tribute, and when they sailed their shield-sided ships into the Mediterranean and

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crushed with their axes the helmets of Magyar and Saracen.

These jarls and vikings were not men to submit when they were beaten. So, when Harold Fairhair conquered, they spread to find new lands of their own over the sea. Some conquered and occupied counties of England; some established themselves in Gaul; some at Dublin and Limerick; others overran Scotland, the Orkneys and Shetlands, and some sailed on to Iceland. Picked men these were, the strongest and most daring of the boldest stock of Europe.

Now, in the records of those vikings who reached and occupied Iceland it is written that in 876 a sailor named Gunnbiorn was driven by foul weather to a land still farther west, where his ship was caught in ice. He and his men managed to survive till the summer freed them and they returned to Iceland and told of the new land. But a hundred years passed before any one proved the story. Then in Norway one Eric the Red killed a man in a quarrel and ran to refuge in Iceland. Quarrelling again with his neighbours, he killed several and

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took his ship and his followers and fled to find Gunnbiorn's land in the West. He rounded that southern cape now called Farewell, and as it was summer he found the grass green and the land sunny and smiling. He settled and sent for more bold men, who came with their families and household goods and their cattle and founded the colony of Brattahlid on the west coast of Greenland which looks toward Baffin Land. Four hundred miles further north they established another settlement. The ships of these men were the first to find the shores of the continent of America. In the year 986, one Bjarni sailed from Greenland to Iceland to spend the Yuletide with his father; but his father had gone to Greenland. Bjarni, returning, found foggy weather and when he sighted land it was a wooded shore well to the west and south of his home. In the year 1000 Leif, the son of Eric the Red, sailed to that wooded coast and returned to Greenland with a cargo of timber. Seven years later the Greenland colony was strong enough to send four ships bearing one hundred and sixty men, many women and a cargo of cattle to colonise

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the newer coast; these stayed in America four years before the Indians became too strong for them. Two years after their return, another party sailed in two ships from Brattahlid and made a second attempt to settle the wooded land; quarrels destroyed this settlement, and it was abandoned. But the colonies in Greenland continued to thrive and to prosper for more than four hundred years. In their two settlements, the people numbered more than five thousand, one colony containing one hundred and ninety farmsteads and one cathedral and eleven smaller churches, two villages and four monasteries. The colonies became a separate diocese of the church and were sent bishops from Rome, and they paid to the pope their tithes in ox-hides, sealskins and walrus ivory and contributed to the Crusades. There was some culture as well as security in these colonies; a Brattahlid poet composed and bards sang a poem yet known in Iceland. Fifteen generations of Europeans lived and died on the west coast of Greenland before serious troubles came. Hostilities began with the Eskimos; and, with wars and difficulties in Eu-

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rope, few ships sailed for the distant settlement; those which set out were wrecked and when after many years another ship came to Greenland, the fiords were deserted; the stone houses, churches, cattle barns and sheep pens stood echoing empty. The first men to tempt the Arctic had disappeared into it. Thousands of the sons of the boldest blood of Europe with their flocks and herds and horses had vanished; and no man remained to say how or where they had gone.

A few straggling Eskimos came to the coasts to fish and spear seals. Danes, who now claimed the land, arrived and married Eskimos. They left the old ruins of the Norsemen and built their own dwellings. These people form the present population of Southern Greenland, who kill the eider duck and prepare the skins, try out the seal and whale oil and take the polar bear and fox pelts which bring each summer to the settlements the ships of the Royal Danish Trading Company.

One of these vessels, flying the crimson and white-crossed flag of Denmark, was steering up the West Greenland coast from Cape Fare-

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well when a steam yacht with the pennant of the New York Yacht Club at its peak appeared from the southwest.

The yacht—the *Inca,* owned by Howard Bradley of New York—was known in as many harbours of the world as any other ship sailing purely for pleasure. Her owner and his wife had taken the vessel to visit at least one port of every country with a sea coast; her keel had scraped the bars of a hundred tropical rivers, and a score of times she had scurried for shelter into the basins of equatorial atolls.

Lands to the north too were known to her—the Faroes, Iceland, Tromso; and she had come to this same Greenland coast four years before, when Bradley and his wife had been hosts to half the *Aurora* party as far as Julianehaab, as now they were entertaining on board four of those who were to go into the Arctic on the newly chartered *Viborg.*

These four—Margaret Sherwood and her brother, with Price Latham and Dr. Otto Koehler—now stood with their hosts at the bow of the yacht while Bradley pointed out the little islets and the fiords of the rugged, moun-

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tainous coast which they were nearing. The sun was high and warm in a clear sky; and as it was July the ice was cleared from the shore. The snow, save for a few protected patches, was gone; and the green of the grass, which had won for the land its name, brightened great patches of the hillsides. Three of the guests, Margaret and Geoff and Latham, gazed upon this land for the first time. Koehler, who had been surgeon on the *Aurora,* had been one of Bradley's guests on the *Inca* before.

"Settlements of the Julianehaab district—Eskimo, mixed Danish—are ahead there," the host pointed. "The trading ship seems to be making for them too." The Danish vessel was a little ahead. "The Eskimos have seen us from shore, of course. Here come the kayaks!"

Rising and falling with the sweep of the easy shore swell a line of tiny forms appeared within the green water. They dashed nearer and showed themselves to be long, sharp-pointed skin boats, only as wide as the waist of the boatman and driven swiftly by two-bladed paddles, plunged into the sea first to right and

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then to left by strong, skilful arms. A few of the kayaks turned to accompany the Danish trading ship; but most of them raced on toward the yacht, as it was the stranger and more curious visitor. Laughing and shouting, the Eskimos paddled up. They spun their boats about, and overturned and righted themselves unharmed for the applause that greeted them. The yacht slowed to the speed of the tiny skin craft and, guided by the Eskimos' cries and directions, steered cautiously toward the fiord.

"Ask them if the *Viborg* has been sighted," Margaret requested, and Koehler shouted down in the Danish-Eskimo dialect.

No. The Eskimos were familiar with the ship but did not know it was expected back. Doubtless the visitors wished to buy dogs?

The Danish ship reached protection and came to anchor. Already it was beset by clamouring natives. The *Inca* brought up its bevy of boats; the yacht's turbines stopped; the anchor slipped down.

A strip of civilisation three hundred and thirty feet long had been suddenly inserted

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into an Eskimo community. The people on that strip were still living as if in the most modern city, surrounded by servants, with bedrooms and dressing rooms and baths in suite, library and drawing-rooms. They dressed for dinner, as at home, and sat about a mahogany table laden with food that was cooked by a French chef and served by English stewards.

As Margaret and her brother looked over the rail at the sod and stone huts and tents on the shore and at the swarthy, semibarbarous seal hunters in their kayaks or on the shore, and then glanced back to the yacht, they knew that the journey into the North had not yet begun. Though in mere distance travelled more than half the journey was behind, the difficulties, the dangers, even all the discomforts, still were ahead. They had not left civilisation or any of its important luxuries; they merely had brought them a few thousand miles with them. Their expedition really would start with the arrival of the *Viborg* at that point.

The trading ship dropped a boat and brought to the yacht the Danish captain, who was familiar with the *Inca's* errand. His ship,

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the *Laeso,* had left Copenhagen after the *Viborg* had started, but had passed the smaller craft at sea two days before.

The Arctic vessel might be expected that night or by morning. All were well aboard. The *Laeso* was to take on at that point those of the *Viborg's* crew who were not going into the Arctic. Also the *Laeso* carried stores, mostly gasoline, for the little vessel. Hosts and guests from the *Inca* immediately went ashore. Latham and Margaret together went through the tiny settlement.

"This is Fifth Avenue or Michigan Boulevard of Greenland," he impressed upon her, as they passed the dwellings. A family feasted bloodily on the blubber and flesh of a fresh-killed seal. An Eskimo woman was chewing off the fat from the skin of eider duck, and then working the skin in her mouth to soften it by more chewing. "When men come back from the Arctic they thank Heaven to get to such a village."

"I thought it would be more primitive than it is," Margaret replied simply.

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"But surely you aren't thinking now of going any farther?"

"Price, we agreed before we left home upon what we were to do."

"I don't mean I want to call off our agreement," Latham said hurriedly. "But——" he hesitated, uncertain.

Margaret looked at him and he glanced away. They had passed through the village and were at the foot of the hills beyond it.

Sometimes, since they had made their bargain together, it had seemed to Margaret that Latham welcomed her condition that she must be upon the ship. He appeared to look forward to their being forced close together by hardship, perhaps by more than privation. At other times the condition he had accepted seemed to frighten him; and the present was one of those times. He spoke no longer on the subject. They walked on together past the settlement and came to hillsides at the very head of the fiord where the slope looked out south over the sea and where the green grass was thickly growing about the ruins of stone buildings—the ancient homesteads of the

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Norsemen who had crossed the Atlantic and lived on that arctic edge of the new world half a millennium before Columbus sailed his ships from Spain.

Geoff and Doctor Koehler and one or two of the sailors from the ship were there ahead of them, moving about among the ruins. The stone walls of the old viking houses still stood and the foundations of the churches—the churches which in the eleventh century sent across the sea of darkness walrus ivory as tithes to Rome. The ancient byres and pens for the cattle and sheep and horses lay traced upon the ground beside the ruins of the barns, drying houses and larders. There had lived in that district something over one thousand people. Behind, the mountains rose bleak, bare, cheerless; in front was the sea, green and white, blotched with great icebergs drifting by. From the high hillside they could see the ships down in the fiord.

Geoff came up close beside his sister. "How many ships these stones have seen go by to the north," he said, caught for a moment by the drama of the spot.

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Latham looked quickly about. "And how few return to the south," he said.

"To-morrow, likely enough, old boy"—Geoff addressed the stone tower which his hand touched—"you'll see the *Viborg* come in sight down there where you first saw Frobisher, Baffin, Davis and the rest of the fellows who wanted to see what's up there in the ice. You ought to know by this time who's coming back. Are we coming back or not?"

"Shut up!" Latham stopped him. "You're not only foolish; you're dismal"; and he pointed toward Margaret.

She laughed. "I was thinking about the same thing," she said. "If these stones could tell the stories of the ships they've seen pass by! If they could tell only the story of the old Norsemen who lived here and then disappeared!"

"They're flying some signal on the *Inca*," Latham said, his glasses to his eyes.

"The recall to dinner." Geoff looked at his watch. "Let's beat it back. Evening dress, Meg, to-night for the last time and champagne and anchovy and a steward behind your chair."

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CHAPTER VI

QUARTERS FOR THE ARCTIC

THE next morning the *Viborg* arrived. Plainly the ship had been built for strength, and not for either beauty or accommodations. As the party on the yacht watched the little arctic vessel come up and anchor Geoff closely observed his sister.

The *Viborg*, as it measured itself beside the *Inca*, was not half the yacht's length. A long bowsprit only aggravated the stubbiness of the bruised and battered hull; a single stout mast with brown sails bent upon it composed the visible means of propulsion. The auxiliary engine, driven by gasoline, required no stack that showed. There was a large hatch for the hold amidships, a hatch to the forward cabins and another to the engine room and cabins aft.

Heavy anchors and chains and other gear encumbered the forward deck, and appearances had not been helped by the circumstance that

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a large seal recently had been killed and cut up on the deck. As a foretaste of the time when dozens of dogs must be kenneled there, five of the best beasts of the last *Viborg* expedition, which had been shipped at Denmark, were running about, smeared with the blood of their seal feast and barking at the nearness of land.

Half the crew of six men who had worked the vessel across the ocean busied themselves with scrubbing and cleaning to prepare for the visit of the *Viborg's* new owners. Geoff, watching his sister, saw her glance once at Latham, who shook his head; but she, without waiting for the cleaning on board the other ship to be finished, went down to the boat beside the yacht. Geoff and Latham and Koehler entered the boat with her and rowed to the *Viborg*.

Captain Jerry McNeal, of the lost *Aurora*, met them and showed them about. He had been informed by cable and by letter, when he went from England to Copenhagen to take the *Viborg*, that one of the cabins was to be occupied by Miss Sherwood. He had not entirely credited the information, but had kept one

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cabin clear and unoccupied on the voyage over.

There were two cabins forward of the hold; one had been shared by McNeal himself and Brunton, now first mate. They were ready to turn this over to Latham and Geoff, for the cabin next to it was the one which was best for a woman and was the one which had been unoccupied. The after cabins, abaft of the engine room, had accommodated four men on the way over and would easily bunk the five men who, besides the two to be cabined forward, were to go to the Arctic.

The hold and all the spare space in the engine room had been stored with supplies. Both sides of both compartments were lined with tightly built in, specially constructed tanks containing the gasoline supply for the engine —something upward of three thousand gallons. The hold was laden to the hatch also with wooden cases manufactured to fit together to fill every inch of space. These cases contained dried vegetables, pemmican and other food supplies estimated to last three years.

"That is, we shall be provisioned for three

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years after we take our deck load from the *Laeso*. We're going to take more gasoline too, besides filling up the tanks we've emptied getting here. When do we move out, sir?" Captain McNeal addressed Latham.

"The *Laeso* goes up as far as Godhaven," Latham replied. "She'll give you your freight there. I'm going to get the *Inca* to go a little farther too, if the sea is free from ice. So we won't come aboard just yet."

Margaret made no comment till they had returned to the saloon of the yacht.

"You're putting off changing to the *Viborg* on my account?" she asked.

"Chiefly."

"Then please don't."

"Bradley'll be glad to go up as far as the ice lets him. He would have offered, but really he didn't think you'd go beyond here."

"Please don't ask him. He and Mrs. Bradley have done too much now. I can't let you ask him to do more on my account."

Latham turned to Geoff. "What do you say?"

"If she goes on board now and can't stand

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it, she can get on the *Laeso* at Godhaven and come back. She'll have time to get sick of it—if she's going to—before it's too late to return," Geoff suggested.

"How about taking the freight from the *Laeso* now?" Latham asked.

"Taking a deck load before we have to would be running a needless danger," Margaret returned. "Going on board now is merely an inconvenience."

"All right," Latham agreed, and went out and gave his orders.

Immediately men began transferring to the *Viborg* the personal effects, scientific instruments, medicine and other supplies that had come from the States on the yacht. The extra men brought over from Denmark as engineers went aboard the *Laeso*. Good-byes were said that night and thanks given to the owners of the *Inca*. That same night—the sun was shining now almost twenty hours—the *Laeso* started north, the *Viborg* following.

"Arctic trim, eh?" Geoff said cheerfully, as he crowded into the cabin which he and Latham

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were to share together. Latham looked about the narrow quarters dubiously.

"No, we haven't half our dogs yet," he reminded grimly.

Geoff went out while his friend changed his clothes. The transformation from the club life on the yacht to the cramped, ill-lit quarters, discomfort and necessity for doing for yourself whatever was done, had been sharp and sudden. Geoff met his sister in the companionway. She was dressed in sweater, trousers and slicker; her hair had disappeared under an oilskin cap. She smiled at him.

"It's getting nice and nasty on deck," she suggested. "Let's go up."

She looked surprisingly small in the man's outfit, and delicate and nervy. Geoff seized her impulsively and stooped and kissed her.

"'Scuse me," he apologised. "Won't do it again. Forgot myself; but—you're all right."

She flushed red with pleasure and went up with him to the deck. The wind was blowing up from the north, and a cold, sloppy rain was falling. The sea was rising with great, heavy swells. Jerry McNeal, in his oilskins, was

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standing his watch at the wheel. All sail was spread that the little ship would stand, but the *Laeso* was slipping away.

"If you and Latham"—Jerry McNeal already had dropped the misters—"have assigned yourselves to run that gas engine when we need it, we need it now. Get busy below, either one of you or both of you. Get the engine going; then stand by below for signals."

Geoff returned to his bunk. Latham had finished changing his sea clothes. The two went upon the slippery deck, staggered aft to the engine-room hatchway, dropped down to the engine-room and set to work.

The gale soon blew out, and with the sea encumbered only by floating icebergs and no pack ice the work of the *Viborg* for the following days was easy and simple, as it followed the course of the *Laeso* up the West Greenland coast. Crossing the Arctic Circle in the middle of July, the sun now was shining continuously when the sky was clear, only grazing the horizon at midnight.

The coast which they skirted was still spotted with small, scattered settlements of

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Eskimos and Danes; and seal hunters' kayaks often darted out from the fiords. Two hundred miles above the Arctic Circle they approached their next halt and the last port for the *Viborg* till its return, the tiny town of Godhaven, from which the Danish Inspector of Northern Greenland governs the lands from the Arctic Circle up the ice-clad coast to where even the temporary snow-hut camps of the migratory Eskimos cease.

Before Godhaven, as a harbinger of battles with the ice soon to come, barriers of grounded bergs blocked the channel. The *Laeso,* still leading, found a way in; the *Viborg* followed, and, anchoring beside the trading ship, replenished its gasoline tanks and took the deck load from the Danish ship. There last calls upon the Danish authorities were made; the dogs left there by the men from the *Aurora,* and other dog teams and sledges, were brought on board with supplies of the Northern Eskimo skin clothing for winter.

At midnight, in bright sunlight, the *Viborg* bumped out between the icebergs, alone, deep laden and heavy, and steered on up Baffin Bay.

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"Now to get as far as we can while the ice may give us a channel!" McNeal cried to his engineers. "Full speed all the time till the ice tries to stop us; and then we'll just begin really to use the engine."

The Greenland shore for many miles yet was dotted with encampments of Eskimos; but these no longer offered supplies. The *Viborg*, under power and with sail spread, steered on north.

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CHAPTER VII

"NOTHING'S THE MATTER"

THE plan of proceeding, until Mason Land was reached, was simple. West of Northwest Greenland lies a great island best known as Ellesmere Land. West of this the next great arctic island is called Heiberg Land, and beyond this a small archipelago of frozen islands rings the polar sea and takes the landward crush of the great polar ice pack.

One of these islands, known as Mason Land, had been used as a base by the *Aurora* expedition, and upon its northern shore the *Aurora* men had built a shack and left there a large depot of food, fuel and supplies in case accident happened to their ship in the polar ice and retreat was forced. The four men who returned from the *Aurora* reached this depot and waited there two months, sending back search parties to look for Thomas and Hedon. No trace was found; so the four white men

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with the three Eskimos provisioned themselves from the station and managed to reach Smith Sound, where they were taken off by a whaling ship.

If Thomas and Hedon, or either of them, had not been lost in the lead but had regained the ice pack and somehow had got through the winter there, it was certain that they would make every effort to reach this spot on Mason Island. Indeed, if it was found that neither of them ever did reach this depot, it would be practical proof that both must have been lost; whereas, if either got to the station on Mason Land, he undoubtedly would either remain there or leave a message stating his subsequent plans and the direction of his travel to guide any relief party.

Mason Island, therefore, was the first objective of the *Viborg*. It was the land mentioned in the message sent by Robert Massey. If there were no message at Mason Island and no other indication that either man had reached the station, the plans of the expedition would be governed by circumstances. Of course the

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finding of any message would control the later movements of the relief party.

In the year in which the *Aurora* went up ice conditions were such as to give fair channels; but during the later seasons the whalers who had been attracted by rewards for finding Thomas or Hedon had met impassable barriers of ice two hundred miles short of the island and had turned back.

The smallness of the *Viborg*, however, promised it favours from the ice such as the little *Aurora* had found in fighting its way up through narrow, closing channels. And those handling the *Viborg* were men to get a ship through where any hull could squeeze.

The ship's people, besides the three in the forward cabins, were five. In the first cabin aft now was Captain Jeremiah McNeal, bluff, able, stubborn, sincere, forty years old and without wife or bairn. He had shipped before the mast of a Scotch whaler at the age of eighteen, and had spent just sixteen of the intervening twenty-two years of his life within the Arctic Circle. He was a short, square, stocky man, smooth shaven as are most who live long

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in the North. No danger of the seas or ice, of cold or starvation ever had affected him. Geoff remembered him at the time he came to Chicago to report to Margaret his belief of the loss of Hedon. The skipper who had led his party on less than an inch of new ice, crackling at every step, over two miles of the Arctic Ocean, held back before plunging into the traffic on the city streets. He was miserable in the crowds of civilised places.

Cabined with him was Dr. Otto Koehler, a Bavarian and McNeal's best friend. Koehler was a year or two younger than McNeal, but with Arctic experience scarcely shorter. The men had met when the Scotchman, as master of the whaler *Cabot*, had rescued the survivors of a lost German expedition from the ice near Franz Josef Land. McNeal had taken Koehler to his cabin, and cursed him while he cared for him because the doctor was nearly dead from having given his ration of food to another.

Koehler, in contrast to McNeal, was tall, thin, almost gaunt, taciturn but always cheerful. His few words invariably expressed optimism. Besides being surgeon and meteorolo-

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gist, he had the knack of languages. He understood Eskimos and made the Eskimos understand him.

Jules Brunton, first mate, was ten years younger than these two, and had been skipper of a Cape Breton fishing smack till he entered under McNeal in the *Aurora*. He was a big, powerful man, friendly and smiling; and he possessed a fine barytone voice in which he sang French ballads. Appearing in the morning, he had a word for every man and dog in sight; and he could be heard humming to himself in the night when he stood his lonely watch at the wheel.

Olaf Michaelis, "the melancholy Dane," matched Brunton in size and endurance. He had been a stranger to the others till they took the *Viborg* at Copenhagen. Michaelis' Arctic experience had been entirely on that vessel; he had been in the crew on both of its earlier voyages into the Arctic. He was a quiet man with a reputation for sticking to his post in trouble. Given an order, he obeyed implicitly.

Hugo Linn, the cook, was the fourth of the present crew who had been on the *Aurora*. He

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had been in Thomas' pay and accompanied Thomas more out of fidelity than out of any spirit of adventure; but once having been north, the lure of the Arctic caught him. He was about thirty-five and a little inclined to be fat. Under Thomas' tutoring he had developed an interest in zoology, and blew, without breaking, the shells of eggs of eider duck brought him to fry, and preserved also the skeletons of any unusual fish that he cooked.

He and Koehler also were able seamen as well as the others. With so small a crew, a storm meant all hands on deck except the man who might remain below at the engine.

The dogs, now twenty-six in number, overran everything, slept on the hatches and quarrelled and fought over the cases and boxes piled below the swinging boom. They left no peaceful spot on deck in which to lounge when the *Viborg* was sailing through smooth and unobstructed waters.

The woman of the party alone had no definite duty assigned to her, but found each day a hundred things to do. She learned from Koehler how to make meteorological observa-

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tions and keep records of air and water temperatures, wind directions and velocities and magnetic variations. When she would be in the way on the deck, patiently for days on end she kept herself in her stuffy cabin.

As the *Viborg* buffeted its way against hard seas and slipped and squeezed between the icebergs of choken channels, Margaret constantly was studying the men about her. She noted with a thrill of admiration how the men accustomed to the Arctic steadied to their work and seemed to welcome, indeed invite, difficulties and obstacles for the triumph of overcoming them. They were more cheerful in exhaustion as more and more endurance was required of them; they loved the dangers that made them dare more, they gloried in the constant challenge of the elements.

Margaret saw with pride that her brother already was catching some of the sense of this challenge and was responding to it. A storm which had kept all hands above for thirty hours blew out; and Geoff, staggering with exhaustion, passed her on the way down to his bunk. Within half an hour, as the gale was

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blowing up again, he had to be called. She liked the way he came up on deck, with hands clenched, teeth set and smiling grimly.

Latham also came back on deck with Geoff. He had been on duty as long; he was almost as exhausted as the boy, and he was returning without complaint to his work. But it was plain to Margaret, as she met him, that Latham was driving himself to his tasks in a different spirit from the others. The Arctic work—hardship and privation, obstacles ever to be overcome—in itself did not appeal to Price Latham at all; and such work never would. He was forcing himself with his will power to endure exhaustion that he hated and that made him keep tight control over his temper in order to get the work through with, that he might demand his pay for it.

Margaret, of course, knew the pay he expected to require. As she faced him at such a moment as this, suddenly it frightened her to realise how firm was his determination to possess her if he would drive himself thus to gain her.

"Like this?" she asked him.

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"You know I don't," he returned to her.

"I'm sorry."

He put his hand upon her and seized her. "I'd do more for you!" he said almost savagely.

"You mean to get me," she corrected calmly.

He released her and went on. She saw then, as she had realised many times before, that Latham had not the least idea that they might find Eric Hedon. The expedition meant to him merely a necessary hardship, a labour of Hercules, to be endured before he could claim her. What would Price do when Eric was found? For Margaret never for an instant let herself believe anything but that they must find Eric Hedon.

So far Latham had kept his irritation under control in her presence; but Margaret more than guessed that Price was not so careful before her brother. Geoff, alternating with Latham in the engine room, indeed seldom saw him except for a few moments. They were in their cabin together only on those rare occasions when, with the sea somewhat free from ice and with a favouring wind, the engine was

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stopped to save fuel as the sails alone promised progress.

"What would you give for a shower-bath, hot, and a rub at the club afterward?" Geoff suggested incautiously on one of these occasions.

"You idiot!" Latham burst out at him almost savagely. "Got that carbon cut out of the first cylinder?"

"Pretty well. I say, Price, what's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. Look here, young fellow, you be mighty careful not to say anything's the matter. Do you understand?"

"Oh; I understand," Geoff said queerly. He was worn out, but just then he preferred the deck to the cabin. He had been understanding for himself for some time that there were infinite differences between racing a two-hundred-horsepower boat one hundred miles in three hours over smooth water, and then turning the craft over to mechanicians for cleaning, carbon scraping, overhauling and repairs while you lunched triumphantly at a club, and running a twenty-horsepower engine an indefinite num-

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ber of days at four miles an hour, cleaning and chiseling carbon yourself, and then dropping, unbathed and unmassaged, into a clammy bunk.

Geoff met his sister carrying down toward their cabin a pail of coffee and some hot food.

"Thanks, Meg." He took them from her. He saw that she had heard at least the tone of Latham's last threat and that she was worried. "Oh, everything's all right between us," he assured her hastily. "My fault, I guess. I'll see it doesn't happen again."

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CHAPTER VIII

OFF MASON LAND

THUS the first barriers to the advance into the North were passed in July. A score of vessels, ice-crushed and split, lie at the bottom of these Arctic channels; but the *Viborg* at last turned, in fog that was dense, dark and all-obscuring, westward to work between the islands opposite Greenland to the goal on the shores of the west polar sea.

Day after day the Arctic fog shut out the sun and the sea and blanketed icebergs ahead and alongside. The weather was not cold as thermometers show temperatures, but its penetrating dampness chilled men through and through. McNeal, tough Arctic sailor though he was, shivered at the wheel. The men on watch—and now lookouts were needed on watch everywhere, besides a man constantly to cast the lead—were near perishing with the cold, and stamped their feet and beat their

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hands in the endeavour to keep warm. The fog settled down and drenched everything it touched. When it lightened, heavy rains—cold, black, dreary rains—poured down and made sheer misery even for the dogs, who would not lie on the soaking decks but stood about day after day surly and dejected, too spiritless even to fight, and took their sleep on their feet. Disease broke out among them; and each morning for a week a rifle rang out, to put dying beasts out of pain and prevent spread of their infection to others.

Slowly, painfully, with infinite risks and dangers the *Viborg* forced its way on through the fog.

Days came again with the fog cleared. The grey plateaus and wild, rugged heights slipped by; at one spot crosses indicating graves appeared on the shore—crosses well known to Arctic men and that need not be examined. They marked the first of the graves of the six score of Franklin's men who starved to the last man on those shores sixty-five years before.

There the little crosses stood, alone in that dreary land. Ten years had had to pass, Mar-

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garet remembered, and a dozen expeditions were made into the Arctic, before the fate of Franklin's two great ships and his hundred and thirty men could be learned. Might the little *Viborg* with its crew find two men alone in all that northern wilderness?

Lost men, in passing down a shore, would build cairns on headlands to tell their line of travel to any other party. Now and again, as piles that might be cairns appeared, the *Viborg* halted and a boat took men ashore to search the heaps for messages. But only one might have been a cairn built by man; and that was too old and not of the *Aurora* cairn type. It gave no message if it ever bore one. The fog closed over the channels and the ship forced on. The shortening days and the sinking of the sun now warned of the nearing of winter; there was no time to waste while ice conditions in the channels favoured the vessel.

"Stop! Full speed ahead! Reverse; full speed astern! Full speed ahead!" The signals, with the bumping and scraping and battering against the ice in the closing channels, marked the mile after mile that the *Viborg*

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achieved. Once, in a spot where the chart of the only ship which had previously traversed that channel showed deep water, a ledge suddenly shot up from the bottom and the *Viborg* was forced on to it at full speed. The wind and sea drove it harder on. It cost the deck load and too many hundred pounds from the boxes in the hold before the *Viborg*, with engine full astern and all hands pulling on the anchor, got clear. For fifty hours no one slept. But now the goal was nearing. The sea and wind went down; watches again could be divided. Geoff, in his turn, went to his bunk. Toward morning, Latham opened the cabin door and threw himself on his bed.

"McNeal's given it up," he announced. "We're somewhere off the south end of Mason Island, with the ice between us and the shore."

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CHAPTER IX

THE CROSS ABOVE THE CABIN

GEOFF jumped up and went on deck. The morning was clearer and the sun was breaking through the mist, showing a sea choked with ice. For mile after mile ahead and on both sides ice shrouded the water. A few streaks of green showed here and there a narrow crack between the floes; but they were closing constantly and changing.

"'Tis that we were aiming to get through all yesterday." McNeal indicated the ice grimly. "Yet if the fog hadn't cleared I'd not have given up trying. Yon is Mason Isle."

To the left of the bow, in the direction the Scotchman pointed, a shadow of an outline of a rocky shore rose. The mist thinned a little more and now showed it plainly—a black, bold, barren ridge of rock, stretching far back and rising to a height of some fifteen hundred

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feet and running as far to the north and west as the eye could follow it.

"The South Cape!" Koehler confirmed the identification. Brunton and Linn, the other two who had been on the *Aurora,* stood also staring toward the shore.

Geoff watched these men closely. What recollections was the sight of that shore bringing back to them? A part of their hardships, their dangers, there had been told. But Geoff knew that they had told only a part of the experiences which that land must recall.

Geoff looked beyond the men to his sister. Margaret stood at the rail a little away from the others. She was wearing the heavy blouse and the trousers and coat that she had worn almost constantly since she had been aboard the *Viborg.* But this morning she seemed dressed with more particular care, as for an occasion. And as her brother looked toward her he wondered with a deeper feeling of sympathy what the occasion for her would be.

Her eyes were bright and her lips closed firmly together, and her little hand clenched at her side as she gazed toward the shores that

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must tell her whether her lover might yet be alive. Would this land by its silence say that Eric Hedon and his companion had been lost long before and lay with their dogs and sledge at the bottom of the Arctic sea? Or might it tell, instead, that they had gained that desolate place only to die there? For a moment, as she looked at the black barrens ahead, fear of what might be found seized her. Her blue eyes dimmed, her lips trembled, her hands unclenched. Then quickly she banished her dread and her doubt and turned about, hopeful, confident again and smiling. Latham had come up beside her and stood looking from her to the beach.

Geoff watched them, understanding but vaguely the bargain between them. Latham, he knew, was paying for the expedition to prove that Hedon was dead; and up to the time that they went aboard the *Viborg* Geoff had looked upon the proof of Hedon's death as the best outcome for his sister. He had been a boy away at school during most of the time that Hedon had been in Chicago. Hedon had been to him, therefore, only a vague, stubborn

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obstacle between his sister and Latham—an obstacle that every one had deplored. When the change had come with Geoff he himself could not tell; but, as he looked at Latham standing with Margaret, Geoff was aware for the first time that he wanted to find Hedon.

"The cabin is on the other side of the island," Margaret was saying quietly to Price.

"So I understand—about fifty miles away."

"We can't bring the vessel in closer with any safety." McNeal joined them and reported impersonally to both.

"But a boat can make it?"

"Well handled," McNeal qualified. "Who goes?"

"I, of course," said Latham.

Geoff intruded. "And I."

Koehler and Brunton were chosen also.

"It's no Arctic work," McNeal deprecated. "A row of a mile or so with plenty of stout ice to step on to if you're clumsy. And then a tramp of a day or so on shore. You'll take dogs, doctor?"

Koehler shook his head. Of the twenty-six beasts which had been on board on leaving

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Greenland seven remained, and only five of these were in good condition. There was no snow for a sledge journey at that season, but in the manner of the Eskimos' summer travel the dogs might carry packs.

"There'll be only one camp between here and the cabin each way; we can pack our own supply," Koehler decided.

The four for the shore party went about their preparations—blankets, a light silk tent, food and fuel for four days, rifles and cartridges. As they loosened their boat in its davits, Margaret kept close to them.

"I'm not going to ask you to take me," she assured over and over again. "I'd slow you and make it harder. But you'll try to signal me as soon as you can about—what you find?"

"How?" asked Geoff.

"We'll be watching all the time from the ship. You four will probably all come back together. If you've good news, walk abreast about five paces apart; walk two and two together if it's bad. If one comes ahead alone to give us news or—or ask for help or anything else, let him run to the right and then back to

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his path if it's good news; to the left if it's bad."

"You've thought out everything, haven't you?" Geoff grasped her and kissed her.

Price, with pack strapped for the march, halted beside her. The others busying themselves, turned away.

"Do I have a kiss too?" he asked.

She looked up at him startled. At that moment full realisation of one result of their search seemed to come to her. She had fought it off before, not letting herself believe that they might not find Eric Hedon alive. But now, with the final arbitrament so close, she drew back from him; yet, according to her given word, if they found that which must show her that Eric was dead this man must be her husband. And they might find that within the day.

She drew toward Latham trembling.

"For good luck?" She raised her lips.

"For good luck." He kissed her and went back to his place with the others. The boat dropped to the water and the four men sprang in. All rowing, they made good speed down

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the little channels between the ice. Koehler steered for a bit of sloping beach and brought them to the foreshore upon which they could drag the boat above the tide. They climbed up and waving good-bye to the *Viborg*, they set off on their tramp to the old *Aurora* depot.

As they followed the shore about the cape and the ship sank out of sight, there was no place Geoff had ever seen with which to compare in barrenness and desolation this piece of Arctic land. Off shore as far as the eye could see there was ice, and the black rock upon which they marched was as barren. Naked of soil, no bush or twig or shoot of tree or shrub found any root there; nor was there grass or herb. In cracks in the rock shreds of grey moss and lichens grew; nothing else. Mile after mile was marked with no change but the shifting of the lines of the rugged rocks rising in the interior and a different indentation of shore.

Yet this was the land toward which, after the *Aurora* was lost, the four men who returned had struggled on and on and the gaining of which at last had saved their lives. Here

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Thomas and Eric Hedon must have come if they now were alive.

"There is where we took to the sea ice again to sledge south." Koehler pointed out another cape.

They came to it and kicked upon the ground the rusted cans emptied there and left by the four men two years before.

"We came down that shore with sledges," Brunton told in greater detail, motioning with his arms. As he glanced far ahead suddenly he stared and stooped.

"What is it?" Geoff asked, and then looked at Latham who had halted and already had his glasses to his eyes. Far up the bare shore a speck of white showed; and the others now saw it also.

"A skeleton!" Latham decided.

"What?"

Latham handed his glasses to Koehler. The doctor too made out the whitened bones.

"A man's?" asked Geoff.

"Can't tell. Animal's probably."

"Of course."

But as they went on now the four doubled

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their pace. Two hundred yards away Geoff broke into a run.

"An animal!" he called back, as he came close enough to see the claws of the feet and the shape of the skull.

"Animal?" It was Latham close behind him.

"A bear!"

"Yes, that's all."

The two slowed and walked, panting. A change from the tenseness of the first sight of the bones had come over both. Geoff watched Latham and drew a little from him. When Price had seen the skeleton first, had he hoped it was a man's, with one chance in two that it was Eric Hedon's?

Geoff himself once had been ready to believe that Eric was dead—that is, when at home he had been told that Hedon probably had been drowned five thousand miles away, he had chosen to accept that probability. But up here, seeing a skeleton on the shore and wishing that it was Eric's—well, that was different.

Koehler overtook them as they walked more slowly. He stooped beside the bones.

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"A bear," he confirmed; "killed by a bullet through the head."

"Bullet?"

The doctor pointed; there was no doubt of it. Two small holes were opposite each other in the skull. "He was shot by a rifle bullet—last year, I should say. We know this was not here when we went away. Did we kill a bear here, Brunton?"

"Not a bear," the Canadian confirmed. "A seal on the ice, that was all."

"Couldn't you forget?" Latham asked him. "You must have killed it here."

The skeleton had changed from proof that one of the men sought was dead to evidence that one of them at least had reached this land.

Brunton shook his head positively. "None of us will ever forget where we got our fresh meat on that march south," he said. His keen eyes were scanning the outline of the hill farther on. "Besides, we built no cairn here. What do you see there?"

Two piles of stone stood on the promontory farther along the shore. In their concentration upon the animal's skeleton the others had

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missed them till now. The piles stood north and south, the northern heap plainly the larger. They were separated, apparently, by about five paces.

"An *Aurora* type of cairns!" Koehler also recognised. "Two, fifteen feet apart, the larger to the north."

The four hastened, Geoff as before leading, and this time Latham came with the other two.

"The larger would contain the message," the doctor called as Geoff reached them.

"I know." He was tearing the stones away; now the others helped him.

"Look for anything which could be sealed; a little bottle, can, thermometer tube or anything that would keep out water."

Geoff picked up the fragments of a small glass tube.

"Here's something that might have kept out water, but hasn't."

The doctor, taking it, recognised it as a section of barometer tube which had been sealed at both ends, and, judging from the pulp upon the glass, once had contained papers. But the tumbling of the stones in the cairn had broken

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it; the melting snow and rain long before had made a mush of the paper. Nothing could be read from that.

"But we now know that Hedon or Thomas must have got here," Koehler said, as he put down the pulp at last.

"That's not certain," denied Latham.

"Not certain; no." The doctor looked at him. "But we'll find out at the cabin who was here."

That some one had been on the island was more evident every hour. Scraps of gear and cans told the passage of a man—or men—by a route different from that travelled by Koehler, Brunton, McNeal and Linn on their retreat two years before. They slept that night where apparently another camp had been. Starting off early the next morning, by noon they reached a slope which looked down on the northern shore of the island and showed far off on the edge of a little bay the dark dot of the *Aurora* depot shack facing the endless white wastes of the polar sea.

There was no movement about it, and as nearer and nearer they came, still they saw no

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sign of any habitation of the little cabin more recent than that of two years before. Externally it showed to Koehler and to Brunton no difference or disturbance; but now, as they looked up on the hill behind the cabin, there was something new, something that of itself spoke as clearly to the strangers to the little cabin as to the men who had sought it before in refuge and left it again in their retreat to the south.

A rude, wooden cross—a single, lonely cross marking a grave—stood on the slope behind the cabin looking out over it to the sea. Koehler and Brunton had no need to tell each other that it had been raised there since they had left. As far as one might see the lonely cross its message was plain. Two men—Ian Thomas and Eric Hedon—had reached that cabin. One had died there; the other had raised the cross over him.

Which man lay under the cross? And when the other had buried him and raised the little battered cross above the grave, how long had he survived? The hut ahead surely would tell that at least. Geoff again ran ahead of the

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others, gained the door of the hut and, hammering back a bolt, opened the door and went in.

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CHAPTER X

THE RECORD IN THE CABIN

AS Geoff entered the little cabin the interior lay dimly dark and still before him. Most of the light entered from behind through the door which he had flung open. There was one window, small and high, with glass dimmed by a hundred storms.

The main room of the cabin was about twenty feet long and little more than half as wide, with shelves for benches or bunks on both walls. There were a petroleum stove and lamps, cooking utensils and other equipment in evidence. The smaller room beyond had been a storeroom and was filled with boxes and crates. Everything was neatly arranged.

As Geoff stepped in and looked down at the floor he started back. A heap of fur clothing lay in one corner, like a man lying there face downward. Geoff stooped and pulled at the heap and saw no man was there. Still, when

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he straightened, he looked in awe about the silent house for the form of the man who had buried his comrade on the hill.

The coming up of the others and Koehler's question as to how he had found the door brought Geoff's senses back. It was plain that, since he found the door bolted without, the other man could not have died within. He had gone out to die—or to live? At least he had left all in order behind him.

"They—or one of them, anyway—lived here for a long time," Brunton said simply, as he examined the room where the stores had been. "We took away all we could load on our sledges, but we left more than enough supplies for two men for a year."

He showed the empty casks and cases.

Koehler nodded silently. He was searching for the container which would hold the account of what had happened there. Brunton turned over the clothing and blankets left behind; they might have belonged to either of the missing men. There was nothing to tell who had lived last.

"Bandages gone, and antiseptics!" The

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doctor was inventorying the surgical supplies remaining. "Some one was hurt."

Latham, assisting Koehler, took a tin can from a shelf. It was empty, judging from its lightness, but was tightly closed. He pulled off the cover.

"Here's their message!" He pulled paper from the tin. "Thomas was the one that lived last! This must be his writing. It's not Hedon's."

The doctor took the paper from him. "That's neither Thomas' nor Hedon's," he said shortly. "That's mine."

"Yours?"

"Our message we left here. I wrote it and sealed it in that can. Thomas and Hedon—or whoever got here—undoubtedly opened the can and read that, then put it back. They'd write their own report independently, not knowing what a storm might do to this hut. They've added nothing to this."

Latham went to the door.

"Where're you going?" asked Geoff.

"Up the hill to the cross to see if it tells anything."

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Geoff had an impulse to go with him, then turned back. Latham went out. Koehler continued his search, but it was Brunton who, in the semidarkness, found the second tin, seemingly empty but sealed. He cut a hole in the tin with his knife and pulled out a paper. As he brought it into better light under the tiny window Koehler and Geoff crowded beside him. Brunton spread the paper and displayed writing.

"Eric Hedon's!" Geoff cried as he saw it, and the surge of hot blood to his face let him know fully for the first time how hard he had hoped it. He looked to Koehler and to Brunton. They had been comrades to both the men who had come here after them; one had been their leader. This writing, being Hedon's, told them that their commander was the one lying under the cross on the hill. Certainly as much for Thomas' sake as for Hedon's had these men been glad to return to the North.

"Ian, old comrade! Ian!" Koehler repeated hoarsely to himself, as the realisation of Thomas' death there came to him. Brunton bent his head a moment. Yet the next instant,

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as the men looked at each other again, Geoff saw that there was in a way relief in their manner. If at the start of the expedition they could not have chosen which of their two mates they would wish to find if they could find but one, now it seemed better that it might be Hedon.

They turned about. Latham again had come into the hut; he moved less quickly.

"The inscription on the cross says that it is Thomas who is buried back there," he reported to the others as they looked at him. "It says he died a little over a year ago." He gave the date. "That's all."

"We've just found Eric Hedon's report," said Koehler. Latham gazed at it.

"Read it," he directed.

The doctor held the sheets straight and read slowly and carefully.

"'Captain Ian Thomas, commander, and Eric Hedon, engineer, of *Aurora* expedition, returned to this place on May second'"—there followed the date of the second year previous—"'finding from records left here and replaced in same order as found that Jeremiah McNeal,

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sailing master, Dr. Otto Koehler, Jules Brunton, mate, and Hugo Linn, seaman and cook, and Eskimos Natsakat, Uluso and Tanniack arrived here safely upon the tenth of March of same year. They reported loss by drowning of Richard Mullin, mate, and Eskimos Panniuk and Akrut, by breaking through young ice with sledge and dog team attempting to cross lead on retreat from wreck of *Aurora,* which was crushed in polar pack on the first of February about two hundred miles N. W. This confirms our observation of same accident to Mullin and Eskimos, who undoubtedly were drowned.

"'Dr. Koehler, in his report written for the other party, expresses belief that Thomas and the writer also must have been lost at the same time crossing lead——'"

"We know all that," Latham urged impatiently.

"Hedon is properly reporting briefly what he himself observed," Koehler explained. "He could not assume that we got back home; and no one with any experience in the Arctic leaves any message assuming that any other, even in

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the same cairn with it, will be found in good condition."

He continued reading:

"This was supposed with good reason, especially as they waited for us two months and did not move on till they were convinced we must have been lost with Mullin. However, though unable to cross lead which they got over safely, we were able to regain the pack ice and, remaining upon it, were driven north by drift. We fortunately shot one polar bear and two seals, and with supplies saved from *Aurora* we managed to live on the ice, building Eskimo snow shelter. After five weeks wind and direction of drift changed, northerly winds blowing pack south and closing leads ahead of us. By cautious travel and good luck we crossed ice till within two days of this depot. Not being fortunate in finding either bear or seals and without fresh meat and other food failing, Thomas suffered seriously from exposure and exhaustion, and upon April twenty-ninth, when crossing very rough ice, he fell heavily and fractured his right hip. As our dogs were in condition to give some help,

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I was able in four days to sledge him to this cabin where reset hip as well as could.

"'Here we found good amount of supplies remaining, except fresh meat, which was able to procure by hunting seals. Owing to Thomas' weak condition and poor setting of fracture, his hip was slow to knit and it was midsummer before he could be moved. Sea then was open, and, having no boat, we waited for the winter freeze-up to cross the sea ice to the south. Freeze did not come till October, when Thomas, attempting to travel with leg stiff, again fell on rough ground and was so badly injured that he had to brought back to this depot. From effects of this second injury blood poisoning set in. He was very ill all winter; seemed cured from blood poisoning, but after some secondary infection finally died on June first. Buried him, reading service and erecting cross on hill behind this cabin. To-day, June fifth, am starting south from here with team of four dogs in fair condition and sledge. My plan is to follow coast south to open water, cross channels on ice to lands directly south.

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"'Open ice conditions coming early this year, believe this plan better than route announced by McNeal, Koehler, Brunton and Linn to the east, according to their record left here. Am taking with me records of expedition which Thomas and I had been carrying, also diaries and copy of messages left here and all personal papers and letters written by Ian Thomas. On prominent headlands upon shores reached will build cairns of *Aurora* type containing brief reports as agreed.

"'ERIC HEDON.'"

The doctor lowered the paper and looked about the quiet, dim little room. Left in order and locked without, it told no more of the long suffering there of the leader of the *Aurora* party now lying under the cross on the hill; it told no more of the year's vigil of Eric Hedon beside his dying comrade.

"Well," said Koehler at last, "that accounts for more than a year of the time Hedon's been missing. We knew he didn't go south from here till a year ago last June."

"Or start south," said Latham.

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"This isn't quite clear." Koehler referred again to Hedon's record. "He speaks of open ice conditions early last year."

"And from what we've heard on the way up we know that's true," said Latham.

"So he may have had to change his plans after leaving here. If he built that cairn near the bones of the bear on the south shore and left a message there, he did it after leaving here, or otherwise he surely would have mentioned it in this report."

"You mean something must have gone wrong with him after he left here?"

"Not necessarily. He may have built those cairns just to record some alteration in his plan on account of ice conditions, or for any other reason."

Latham took the report from the doctor.

"We've got to look at this sensibly," he said. "This tells us that Thomas and Hedon got back to land here and Thomas died. It also tells us that Hedon left here alone to try to travel south over the ice before it broke up. He seemed to expect, even before he started, to have difficulty in travelling south."

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"What are you getting at?" Brunton asked directly.

"This: His record here of course is proof that he got here safely and started away in June; but it takes away the only evidence that we had that he was living at any time later."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Look at the date on which Thomas died. Thomas was dead and buried here more than two months before the date of the message taken from the bird reporting both men safe here and well."

Koehler looked at him keenly. "I see your point. There may be more to discover on the island. We'll look."

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CHAPTER XI

THE SIGNAL TO THE SHIP

ON the *Viborg*, off the south cape of the black, barren island, Margaret Sherwood had waited for three days and now through the morning of the fourth for news to come from the cabin on the shore of the polar sea. With but three men left on the ship after the shore party had gone it had not been possible for her to land. She knew that she had done the best thing in staying on the ship. Only in case of the party's finding the missing men at the cabin in dying condition could she have helped in any way by going. And she knew that that chance was very, very remote. The shore party either would find that the missing men had never reached the island or that they had come there and gone on or attempted to go on; and in this case the men alone would find the record more quickly and return to the ship more rapidly without her.

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So she argued with herself again and again during the long hours of the days. Yet as she gazed on that land, bare, black and lifeless, a thousand times she pictured the party finding the two men there—or their bodies. Would this last be worse than never to know, never to know?

Margaret recollected herself. If they found no trace of Eric here or elsewhere, and if they never found his body, she now was committed to acknowledge him as dead. So a dazed stupor sometimes seized her as she looked over the ice-choked channel to the grim heights of the shore. If they found Eric dead and brought his body to her, or if they returned to take her to his grave, then she later could carry out her promise to Latham. If she should see Eric once again, though he were dead, or if she had found his grave, she would not have sold herself to Price for nothing. But suppose the shore party brought back no news! That would be proof to the rest that Eric was lost; and she must accept it as proof of his death and give up Eric and marry Price,

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though Eric somehow, somewhere, still might survive and return to seek her.

So on the fourth day she stood at the bow of the little *Viborg*, looking for the dots that would be men marching over the rocks. How would they appear, two together or four abreast, walking five paces apart? Or would six men, instead of four, show on the shore, or five? No, she knew that was almost impossible; but it was not impossible that the four should come in sight separated and abreast in the signal that Eric and his comrade had reached this land safely. And if they brought back that word, she would rejoice that she had not gone with them, though she would not have learned the news for two days after they knew it. For they would reach the ship the quicker without her; and, with the winter now fast approaching, every hour counted. If the four brought from the cabin an indication of where Eric and Thomas might be found they could not follow on that course too soon.

She moved about the deck and tried not to stare too long, then returned to the bow and stood, eyes fixed on the shore. The sun shone

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clearly now at noon; but the rocks made a bad background for men darkly clad. Yet at last Margaret made out one speck and then another moving, then two more following over a ridge.

"There they come!" Her cry brought McNeal to her side. "They're neither walking together nor separated."

"They're no trying to signal us yet," McNeal said simply. "They'd no think we could see them."

The girl and the man stood together in silence. Below Linn was about his cooking. Michaelis, who had been busy, came up quietly and stood a little away.

"Now they must know we see them," the girl said when the men were plainly in sight.

"Then they've no news," McNeal asserted.

"That would be bad news, and they'd signal it. They promised."

"Dip our colours and raise them again," McNeal commanded the mate. Michaelis obeyed.

"Ah, there they signal now!"

The four figures, far away on the shore, separated and walked at even distances apart.

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"Good news!" Margaret cried. "Good news!"

McNeal raised his glasses to his eyes and put them down. "What do you make of that?" he complained.

The four figures which had been advancing separated and abreast now joined in twos and walked together; but again they spread out separately.

"Good news and bad, they must mean." The girl trembled. "They bring both."

There was no doubt about it. Once again, in the same way, the four men on the shore signalled. They came on more rapidly and now reached their boat left on the beach. They launched it and slowly and cautiously brought it out between the lumps of ice now rising and falling uglily with the sea swell.

The four on the deck of the *Viborg*—Linn had joined the others—stood silent, watching the boat draw nearer, with the oarsmen turning at times to see if they were near enough to shout. Margaret made out that her brother and Latham were rowing the bow oars. Geoff, ceasing to row, swung about and shouted

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twice; but his voice came merely as a sound without articulation. Then: "Hedon! Hedon!" The echo of the word reached.

What were the syllables lost afterward? Was she unable to hear them because they told her that Eric was dead? But at least they had found some word; they had learned something. She strained forward.

"Hedon! Hedon!"—the words came again —"reached land safe!"

She caught at the rail to steady herself as she trembled. McNeal put his hand upon hers. She looked to him and saw that he had understood the same.

"Thomas!" he shouted back to the men in the boat. "What of him? What about Thomas?"

"Both reached the cabin safe. Thomas died there. Hedon buried him and went on alone!"

"They got to the cabin," McNeal was repeating incredulously to himself. "They got to the cabin; and Thomas—poor Ian—died there."

"Poor Mr. Thomas," the girl reiterated. "But they said Eric was safe. He went on?"

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"Listen," said McNeal gently. "They're telling us more."

"Hedon left here alone a year ago last June to try for the south over the sea ice!"

Then the boat was alongside, and Geoff, with the messages, jumped up and was pulled upon the *Viborg's* deck. Margaret seized the sheets of Hedon's record and stood staring at them, tears in her eyes at first making her unable to read, able only to know that the pages in her hand bore Eric's writing. She lifted the sheets to her lips and kissed them; and, as Latham came and stood beside her, she met his eyes.

"You see he's alive!" she said to him, half in the humbleness of grateful joy, yet half too in defiance. "You see he's alive. I knew he must be alive."

"He was alive," Latham said quietly, with something of the tone of a correction.

She seemed not to hear him. In triumph, tempered by sorrow as she came to the report of the leader's death, she read aloud the record as Koehler had read it to the three others in the cabin.

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"Now what else?" she cried, hugging the sheets to her when she had finished.

They told her all—of first finding the skeleton of the bear shot through the head, the cairn with the lost message, the cabin with the rude, lonely cross above the grave on the shore of the polar sea.

"You did right not to try to bring back Mr. Thomas' body," Margaret agreed with them. "I know that Mrs. Thomas and his friends and those who were proud of him will like to think of him buried where he left his work."

Koehler told her then of their search after leaving the cabin. The cairn on the south shore, which had contained the destroyed message, probably was built to tell some change in Hedon's plan. They had looked in every probable place for any other cairn that might have preserved a message or for any other trace of Hedon's course after leaving the cabin; but had found nothing. The girl again unfolded the sheets from the report in the cabin.

"But this is perfectly clear," she said. "He went over the ice to the south a year ago last June."

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"Exactly," said Latham, "a year ago last June."

"And would have built cairns on the shores south of here."

"You've seen, of course, by the date of that record that the message from the wild goose was what I said it must be, a fraud?"

"But you've seen what I knew all along—that Eric Hedon is not dead. He is not dead!"

Latham turned without a word from the land and looked back over the sea to the south. The morning was clear and sunny, and as far as the eye reached only open water stretched; and all knew that for mile after mile beyond the grim, green horizon was water where the ice must have broken up early and treacherously in the spring of the year before—the ice over which Eric Hedon alone must have tried to travel.

"If he reached land again south of here," Latham said quietly, "we will find his cairns. He was very definite about that in his report."

"So let's follow him as fast as we can," Margaret cried.

McNeal looked at Latham, who nodded. They pulled up the boat and lashed it again to

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the deck. The wind was blowing from the north and the sea beginning to surge higher. There was a breath of winter in the air.

"Did you build our cairns on the shore, Otto?" the skipper called to Koehler.

The doctor looked up.

"What cairns?" Margaret asked.

"The *Viborg* expedition cairns, of course," McNeal said shortly, "as Koehler arranged with the Arctic Society in New York. Our cairns are to be two, about fifteen feet apart, in a line east and west, the larger to the east and to contain the message."

"What for?"

"For those who may come to look for us," the Scotchman said simply. "Did you remember, Otto?"

"I didn't build cairns, but left a record at the depot," the doctor replied.

"What did you leave?" Margaret asked.

The doctor gave her his copy sheet, and she read aloud.

"'The *Viborg* expedition, under direction of Price Latham and consisting of Jeremiah McNeal, sailing master, Jules Brunton and Olaf

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Michaelis, mates, Geoffrey Sherwood, Sherwood and Latham acting as engineers, Otto Koehler, physician, and Hugo Linn, cook, and accompanied by Margaret Sherwood—purpose, the relief of or finding records of Ian Thomas and Eric Hedon, missing from *Aurora* expedition of four years previous—arriving off the southern cape of this island August sixteenth'"—there followed the year. "'On same day, Latham, G. Sherwood, Brunton and Koehler landed and found on shore bones of bear shot by rifle near cairns of *Aurora* type containing indecipherable message. These were not there when McNeal, Brunton, Linn and Koehler crossed island on retreat from *Aurora* wreck. Party crossing island reached this spot on the seventeenth, discovering grave of Ian Thomas and report of Eric Hedon telling of Thomas' death at this point and Hedon's plan of travel south. Copied his report, leaving copy and taking original. All in good health, returning to ship, and doubtless will endeavour to follow Hedon's projected course as closely as possible.'"

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"That'll do." McNeal glanced over this after her. "Then let's be on Hedon's course as quick as we can."

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CHAPTER XII

"MUTINY"

IN fair weather and with a following wind and sea they sailed south over the Arctic water. When they went north, fighting their way through the fog, with the ice that had floated down from the polar sea ever threatening and withdrawing before the bows of the little boat, Margaret and Geoff had not appreciated the isolation of the island. If Latham had failed to realise that before he gave no sign; but every mile now that they sailed, with the ocean, except for the icebergs, boundless about them, seemed to add greater and greater strength to his doubt of ever finding further trace of Hedon. Margaret saw, too, that the first enthusiasm which had been inspired by finding Eric's record was wearing away from the others as they thought it over.

"It isn't as if Hedon could have stayed on Mason Island, if he wanted to," Latham said

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to Margaret on the second day that they sailed south. "He had no food to stay. He and Thomas before he died had used almost all the supplies left in the cabin. Hedon couldn't count on getting enough game to see him through another winter; and he wouldn't have had time to reach a game country if he waited till the freeze-up in the fall. He was practically driven to go over the ice when he did, no matter how he found it."

"I have been realising that," Margaret admitted.

"I think after he crossed the island for the last time he shot that bear and saw the ice was in such bad shape that he waited there on the chance that the bear might mean there was enough more game to carry him through. Then he got nothing more; knew that he had to go on, though the ice was getting worse, so built his cairns and went on."

"I think that may be so," she again agreed quietly, and moved away. That afternoon there came into sight the first of the islands which they must search for proof of whether Eric, driven south by hunger over the break-

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ing-up ice, again had reached land. That afternoon began the first of a series of vain journeys ashore to examine headlands, capes and promontories where cairns, if cairns were to be found, surely ought to be. Now the sun disappeared for longer and longer hours each night, and circled closer to the horizon in the shortening periods of light. Snow swirled from over-clouded skies when the gale blew from the north. The *Viborg* skirted the shores of other islands; the landing parties, which now sometimes included Margaret herself, tramped up and down the rocks in vain. Again and again piles of stones sighted from the ship brought a boat hurrying to the beach; but each time the piles proved natural heaps. Bones found gave no evidence that any man, with a rifle or without, had hunted in any of those lands.

By the chart with which the *Aurora* party had been provided and by which the *Viborg* also sailed, there were but two routes which any man travelling south over the ice would have followed or tried to follow. The first, taken by the four who got away from Mason

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Island early in the spring, had been expressly eliminated by Hedon in his report. There could be no doubt that at the time when he left Mason Island it was the more dangerous of the two. Moreover, if later he had changed his mind and tried it, some sign of his cairns would have been found by the *Viborg* on the way north. The *Viborg* now was following the other route; and after leaving Mason Island found absolutely no trace of any man.

Geoff, coming on deck the day after the last land likely to hold hint of Hedon's fate had been searched, found the water freezing as it dashed up on the *Viborg's* side. Yet the search pressed on. They had worked past the first islands which Hedon must have reached if he got across the sea south of Mason Land, and now they skirted other Arctic shores. The men no longer expressed to Margaret their expectation of finding some cairn or other trace as they left the ship. She could see that all who had had experience in the Arctic—McNeal, Koehler, Brunton, Michaelis, even Linn—had been gradually abandoning any anticipations of finding Hedon; but, strangely, with the de-

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creasing chance of success came a more dogged determination to drive themselves to their task. If they rowed through icy surf to rocky shores and, half soaked, tramped hours on end in their useless search, they did it with even greater cheerfulness the harder and more vain their work grew.

By common consent Margaret and Latham had ceased to discuss chances; yet to her each glance from him now inquired: "Have you given him up?" Each tone of his voice, no matter what the words were, said to her: "You know no one'll ever find him. I've won you now; you have to give up."

And in her tones, though her words did not relate to the matter at all, she said: "Not yet. Not yet. Not yet."

Yet as her soul said that she trembled. It was not because she had given up Eric—she knew now that she never could do that; but it was because she knew that by the terms of her pledge to Price he soon might claim her and she could not deny his right.

The evidence which they had found at Mason Land, which told them Eric had

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reached there alive and had left there, had become the best proof that he later was lost. Men from the *Viborg* now had searched every shore he might have reached had he survived the long, lonely journey over the breaking-up ice; and they found no trace of him. Eric's own record of his plan, and his promise to build cairns if he again reached land, certified to his disappearance forever.

When would Latham announce to Margaret that she could show no proof that Eric lived? When would he demand of her to redeem her word? So she waited, while slowly the *Viborg* worked its way south in the continuance of its hopeless search. Geoff was alternating with Latham again in the engine room when the ship was proceeding. While the vessel had been anchored, awaiting the return of Latham, Brunton and Koehler from a search on shore, Geoff had been cleaning the cylinders. He came on deck and found a snowstorm blowing up. There was a greater chill and penetration in the north wind than there had been before, and he saw, as he looked at the water, that the snow drifting into it was not immediately melt-

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ing, but mingling and forming a slush which spread over the surface.

Margaret was below in her cabin and Linn was getting dinner. McNeal and Michaelis were busy together with the stiffening ropes and freezing gear about the mast. The seven remaining dogs were curled up and sleeping comfortably on the ice-clad deck. The boat from the shore came out, struggling and half swamped in the surf. The three on deck watched the three in the boat silently, with ropes ready to aid them as they came alongside. Days before they had stopped shouting for news of any kind.

The men from shore got aboard, and with great difficulty all six together drew up the light sea boat. Latham stamped on the deck beside McNeal. The moment before his clothes had been soaked; now they were stiffening on him.

"The sea's slush!"

"It won't be long," McNeal returned.

"You mean?"

"It'll be ice. Wait till the wind goes down. Yon slush is the beginning of sea ice."

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"Damn! You mean the freeze-up?"

"The winter freeze-up."

"Then get us out of here," Latham ordered; "and get us out of here quick."

McNeal, stung at the tone, spun upon him belligerently. "Get us out of here?" he returned. "How—by tramcar? You think this is Chicago, with the first cold snap at Christmas just in time for Santa Claus?"

"You're insolent!" Latham returned.

"Insolent?" cried McNeal. Koehler caught him by the shoulder to check him. At that moment Margaret appeared from below, and McNeal's words, which just had begun to flow, were stopped.

Latham turned to her. "McNeal was just saying the freeze-up is coming, so I ordered him to get us as far south as he can before it."

This was not the way, Margaret knew, in which Price had meant to claim her. But as she faced him she was aware that since the matter had come up he was going to put it through. The others—McNeal and the doctor, even Brunton and Michaelis—understood vaguely that the abandoning of further search

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for Eric involved, in some way, her turning to Latham. She knew that Geoff had guessed much more. And now as she looked quickly to Koehler she saw that more complete comprehension was coming to him; and McNeal, slower witted but with quicker feelings, was clenching his big hands at his sides.

"You mean you are ordering the end of the search?" Margaret asked Latham.

"Do you believe there is any use in keeping it up?"

"A little longer at least," she said tremblingly.

"How far off is the freeze-up?" Latham asked McNeal.

"No one knows," the Scotchman said. "We may get ice to-morrow, if we get a calm and it's colder. It may be a month off if the winter's late."

"But probably?"

"Two weeks; some chance of three."

"Of open channels?"

"Or little ice."

Latham closed his lips tightly. "I thought so. With the channels as we found them go-

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ing up, and no fog now, we can get back to Baffin Bay and Greenland with fair luck."

Margaret seized his sleeve. "But you aren't going to order it yet?"

"Of course I am. I should have done it weeks ago."

"Why?"

"The winter's coming."

"We—I'm prepared for it."

"If necessary, if anything goes wrong, or if there was any use in staying, I'd let you; but as it is I can't."

"You aren't thinking of me," she charged quickly.

"Yes, I am."

For the instant both seemed to forget that others were watching them.

She recoiled from him. "Yes, I know you are, and I know how you're thinking of me," she gasped. "But you can't make me give up Eric yet."

Latham looked from her. "McNeal, do you believe Hedon's alive?" he inquired point-blank.

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The Scotchman looked from one to the other and evaded: "I'd no say we'd not find him."

"But you have said so. I've heard you."

"You never heard me say that to you," the skipper charged.

"Then I overheard you. Koehler"—Latham turned—"will you say that Hedon's alive?"

"I'll say nothing about it," the doctor returned.

"But you have said something about it." Latham glanced to the others and turned back. "There's no use asking them in your presence what they think, Margaret," he said. "But they know what they believe, and I know it and so do you; and it's what you also believe. They're all weak enough before you to fill you with more hopes and keep you here through the winter night, but I'll not. McNeal, we start now full speed, without halt, to get to Greenland."

The Scotch skipper met his eyes fairly. "Do we?" he asked.

"I've said so. We do."

McNeal shot a glance at his mates. "Do we,

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Otto?" he referred. "Brunton? Michaelis? Do we?"

"What do you mean by asking them?" Latham demanded hotly.

"Aren't they men?" returned the skipper.

"But I pay them and I pay you." Latham lost control of himself as he was defied. "You do as I say."

"Do we?" repeated McNeal again. "Geoff Sherwood, do we?" He did not wait for the boy's reply. "We don't."

"You don't?"

"We don't give up Eric Hedon as long as any one wants to look for him." The Scotchman paused, and then, to anticipate the other's reply, went on: "With your pay or without it."

Latham, stiff in his struggle for restraint, stared about the party.

"What are you talking about? Do you know what you're saying?"

"Cut off our pay," the Scotchman defied. "Forget it. Do you suppose any man on this ship ever came into the Arctic for pay—but yourself?"

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"What do you mean by that?" Latham advanced.

"You make it plain that you know." McNeal stood his ground. "Stop our pay that's running on in your mind, Price Latham. You've given us none of it. Charge it all back to yourself. But if Eric Hedon's alive we'll cheat you of your pay yet." And he looked at Margaret. Latham retreated.

"You—you won't obey?" he stammered.

"Hit on the head!" McNeal jeered. "You've guessed it."

Latham looked about to the rest. Koehler, quiet, calm, observant, moved a little nearer to McNeal; Brunton and Michaelis were more puzzled, but as Latham looked to them he saw that they too sided with the skipper. Geoff also had drawn away; he was beside his sister and holding her arm. Margaret alone of the five did not meet his eyes as Latham looked toward her. Latham stared at her an instant, then back to the others, and turned and walked away.

"This much more before you go," McNeal called to him commandingly, and Latham

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stopped: "Since I no longer do what you say, you're to do what I say, whatever it is. Understand that!"

Latham, without making reply, moved on and disappeared down the companionway to his cabin. The six left on the deck looked into each other's faces.

"Wasn't that right?" McNeal questioned directly of each of the others, and got the direct reply from each till he came to the girl. She gazed at him an instant as he questioned her, and then without answering at all turned away. She went down the companionway which led to her cabin as well as to that shared by Latham and her brother. The men looked after her; then Geoff, with an abrupt word to the rest, followed her.

He found when he came to her cabin that she had not gone in there. The door stood open. She had gone into his cabin, and he heard her voice and Latham's.

"I see," he heard Latham saying to her bitterly; "you counted on something like this. You couldn't lose. If you found him, all right —good-bye to me. If you didn't find him—

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why, put me off again. You never meant to give him up."

"I don't give him up," Margaret's voice replied. "I don't know that I can ever give him up. In that, perhaps, you're right."

"I thought so."

"But wrong in this," her voice went on steadily. "I'll keep my word. I'll pay you."

"What?"

"My bargain with you was that we were to find Eric or proof that he was alive, or you could claim me. We've found what most people would say was proof that he must be dead; so I acknowledge your right now."

"Margaret!"

"You have carried out your agreement. You have made the search and we haven't found him. So I will keep my word. I'll marry you when we get home."

Geoff beat upon the door, then opened it and burst in.

"What's this, Margaret?" he cried.

His sister turned to him calmly. She extended her hand to Latham. He took it, gazing at her dazedly.

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"Geoffie," she said to her brother, "I want you to witness this. I promised to marry this man if he carried out certain conditions which now are complete. I give him my word that, no matter what we find in any later search which is forced on him, I will marry him, according to our agreement, when we return home."

"I'll witness no such thing!" Geoff cried, and struck their hands apart. "So that was the way of it, was it?" He faced Latham.

The man made no reply.

"Price," Margaret said, "I think we now understand each other. You had my word before. I've acknowledged your conditions fulfilled."

She went out and shut the door. Geoff stood dumb in the cabin with Latham. A shout from above summoned him up:

"To the engine room, one of you! We're getting under way."

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CHAPTER XIII

WINTER QUARTERS

THE course, as Geoff found when he returned to the deck, was being laid to the south; but this was only to search more shores. As Goeff moved among the men he was astonished to see how quickly outward expressions of hostility or antagonism against Latham had ceased. They found that Latham, for reasons which each man might guess for himself, made no longer a protest against the continuance of the search. Indeed, there was no open sign of change. McNeal always had been in command. Formerly it had been understood to be with Latham's approval; now it was known to be with his disapproval; that was all. And no reference was made to any trouble. In such a small party, confined closely in the little ship and facing an Arctic winter, every appearance of agreement must be maintained though agreement itself did not exist.

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So McNeal took the *Viborg* down the shores of new Arctic lands. As the ship crossed a channel and sighted another cape the chart did not even pretend to know of this land. Though the coasts east and west and even those directly north of it were chartered and described, here for two hundred miles only a dotted, hypothetical line on the map recorded the geographers' guess of the coast. Just ten days after McNeal's assuming full charge the *Viborg* reached that coast. For two days the wind had gone down; the sea was calm and the freeze-up beginning in earnest. Another day down this land and a tiny haven, land-locked except for one narrow entrance from the sea, promised the little *Viborg* the shelter required for winter quarters. The narrow entrance would block any great iceberg from entering and endangering the ship; the harbour's basin was small but deep. New ice already lay about the edge of it. McNeal, driving the *Viborg* crashing into this ice, brought his ship into a good position in ten fathoms of water a hundred yards from the shore. There he anchored.

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As soon as he was satisfied with his position he stepped overboard on to the ice and led half his company for a sight of the shore. The temperatures now were below freezing for the twenty-four hours; the sun scarcely showed above the horizon at noon. Every one in the party had tried on his skin clothing bought from the Greenland Eskimos; but the weather so far permitted their wearing the woolen clothes of civilisation.

Margaret still wore a woolen blouse and trousers and her wool-lined leather shoes and cap and ulster. Geoff and Latham likewise still were clothed as for a winter tramp through the Maine woods. McNeal and Koehler had changed only partly to Arctic costume; but this day, as they stood on the shore in the drifting snow and looked over the long, endless reaches of barren, drift-streaked rock and the freezing sea edging it, most of them shivered.

"I make this the northeast coast of Victoria Land," McNeal announced as they stood on the shore. "The whole of Victoria Land is a good deal bigger than Britain; and it's all Arctic, with the bulk of it lying below us. I

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think this coast runs down to Coronation Gulf, which cuts off the south end of this land from the continent. I make our present position about four hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. This land's so big that if Hedon got south of where we've been looking he'd have brought up here. He knew, of course, that some of Amundsen's men in 1904, when they were making the Northwest Passage, found Eskimos a couple of hundred miles below here. He knew Stefansson crossed the southwest end of the island and found more Eskimos; also shot caribou and saw big herds coming from the north. If the beasts have been about here they're moving out now; so if we want fresh meat we can't get after them too quick."

"It's like this farther south?" Latham inquired.

The skipper stooped and pulled some moss from under the snow. It was similar to that which they had seen on Mason Island and other shores which they had searched for cairns.

"There's your turf, underbrush and forests of Victoria Land," McNeal said. "That's about all you'll find from one end of this land

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to the other. That's what the caribou feed on. No one's been about here to tell us much of the scenery, but probably it's more mountainous toward the interior."

Margaret had been paying only scant attention. The words about Hedon had sent her into an abstraction. "Whoever hunts will remember to look for cairns," she said after a moment.

"Yes," said Koehler. "Two of us should hunt in one direction to-morrow morning, two in another.

"I'm on," offered Geoff.

"I," nodded Latham.

Koehler and McNeal consulted. In case of any accident to the ship while in winter quarters they were to establish a station on the shore. As they were planning the place Margaret moved off. Latham hesitated and then followed her.

Geoff watched them for a few moments as they walked together. They talked at times and then went on in silence. The sight of them together now and their accepted companionship disturbed Geoff in a more positive way

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than ever before. Of course his sister and Latham had been thrown into much close contact on the ship; but that had seemed forced, inevitable. Their being together on shore meant more; it meant that though Margaret might choose to avoid him Latham now was claiming her companionship as a right—as he later would claim her as his wife. Geoff was unable merely to watch them longer; he hurried to join his sister.

Almost immediately Latham left, and brother and sister walked up and down together. The snowstorm had ceased, and only light powder from the drifts blew up and whirled into their faces as the wind circled capriciously.

They went on without speaking over the rocky barrens, which undulated a little so that now and then the two sank out of sight of the others on the shore and out of sight also of the ship. The short Arctic day was almost done; the light was grey and nowhere was there any colour. The land had none, being black where the wind had blown off the snow; the rest was white. The sea was the cruel grey of ice, and

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there was no colour in the sky. The clothes of both man and girl were grey or dark.

"Look at me, Meg," Geoff said suddenly. His sister turned. "If it wasn't for your eyes and your lips," he said gallantly, "I'd say I'd gone colour-blind. But they're blue as ever, and red."

She smiled with pleasure, but her blue eyes looked quickly away. "Thank you, Geoffie," she said. "But don't again, at least just now. That's the kind of thing Eric used to say to me sometimes."

"And Price doesn't?"

"No," she replied. "No, not that kind." She stopped and stood a moment, looking about.

"What are you thinking of?" he demanded.

"Eric."

"Of course. But what about him?"

"Of his reaching this coast at last and finding this land, this terrible, bare shore, a goal to struggle toward and spend all his strength to gain. Think of him coming here alone, without a ship or companions, perhaps not even

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with his dogs. 'And if he got here alone ne was alone all the way from Mason Land."

Geoff said nothing for a moment. Then: "You love him, don't you?"

"Love him!" Margaret drew in a breath and could not speak more.

"Then if we find him you won't keep that bargain with Price?"

"Geoff, I made it."

He knew her, and knew that was her answer.

"But Price won't hold you to it," he tried to persuade himself rather than her.

His sister seized his sleeve suddenly. "Geoff, don't make anything harder for me."

"You mean he'll hold you?"

"Geoff, you've seen how hard this sort of life, what he's had to do, has been for him. Do you think the passion that would drive him to that will allow him to let me off? Why, sometimes I've thought if we found Eric at Mason Land he wouldn't let me go."

Geoff stamped his foot. "Meg, how could you have done it?"

"I'd do it again," she cried.

"But——"

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"Geoff, before we started didn't you know that I must have made some such bargain?"

"Yes; but then I thought it was all right if he got you and——"

"Oh, brother, I'm not blaming you in any way. I promised what I did to get what I got. I've had it now and I'll pay for it. Let's not talk about it any more."

"But if we should find Eric now?" Geoff persisted.

"Come, let's run!" She sprang suddenly ahead of him, and he followed her up a little slope to a height which let them look south over miles of bare, low-lying land. They gazed up and down over the barren rocks. Nothing was in sight but the bare basalt, the snow and the ice of the sea.

"If caribou ever come into this country," Geoff said grimly, as he stared about, "certainly any sensible animal must be getting out of here now. If we're going to hunt 'em, McNeal is right—we can't get after them too soon."

"What was that sound?" his sister asked. Geoff spun round and saw half a dozen dark

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spots running wildly about. "Oh, the dogs. Brunton's brought them ashore. They don't seem to have any quarrel with the land, do they?"

"Good fellows!" Margaret patted those that ran to her. "Good old fellows!"

"That must give you some relief—to get them off the ship, Meg," Geoff said as they turned back.

"Why, I haven't been thinking about that," she said, almost with surprise. They went on nearer to the ship.

"What are they doing there?"

A couple of men were coming ashore, tugging at something.

"Oh, a light anchor," Geoff made it out.

The men brought it ashore and made it fast there; then one ran a heavy line from the middle of the mast to the anchor, and it was braced and pulled taut. A pulley block ran on the line and carried casks and boxes for the station on shore and then was drawn back for another load.

Geoff came up to help.

"I'd rather you got to putting the engine-

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room and stores in shape," McNeal directed him. "I've just sent Latham to work there." His tone hinted that there had been trouble.

Geoff went out to the ship and down into the engine-room. Latham was not there, so Geoff set to work himself. He heard McNeal come aboard, and later some sort of quarrel on the deck. Listening he learned that it was between Latham and McNeal, and the skipper won it. Latham, half flung by McNeal, descended the steps into the engine-room.

Geoff bent close to his work and pretended that he had noticed nothing; but Latham knew better. Now and then, as other business brought McNeal to the ship, he looked into the engine-room. With work to do, it was not so hard for Geoff to be with Latham as it was later when they were in the cabin. The thermometer had taken a sudden drop and it was clammy as well as sharply cold.

"It's the confounded lunacy of this whole business that gets on my nerves," Latham broke out. He opened a drawer under his bunk and took out a revolver.

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"What's that for?" Geoff asked, as he watched from the upper bunk.

"I'll give McNeal one more warning; then if he tries anything on me again I'll give him his," Latham threatened.

"No, you won't," said Geoff.

"Why not?"

"McNeal's right and you know it."

"Right?"

"Some one's got to be in command; the rest have to obey him."

Latham made no effort to discuss the right of McNeal to direct. "I won't be run like the cabin boy of a whaler."

"You won't have to if you do your part."

"You mean I haven't been doing it, damn you!" Latham burst out.

"Exactly!" said Geoff, and dropped down in his bunk, listening without rejoinder to the rest of Latham's remarks. At last the man threw himself into his bunk and put out the lantern.

Geoff, as on the night after his sister had declared herself before him, was unable to sleep in spite of his exhaustion. He lay awake

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with the ship now still and motionless, already firmly locked in ice.

The rigging and gear above creaked and hummed in the wind, and he could sense, or imagine that he sensed, the snow drifting up against the ship's side over the ice. Otherwise there was silence through the little vessel.

The cessation of action, of movement, brought to him more keenly than before the utter isolation of these seven men and one woman in the wastes of the North. For a moment fear, fear that made him shudder and clasp his covers with his hands, conquered him, and he realised the terror of trouble between members of this little company, so few and so weak even if united and in harmony.

And trouble already more than threatened. Since the mutiny there was no way except for McNeal to be in control and for Latham to obey. McNeal's manner toward Latham was caused, not so much by Latham's slowness to obey, but by the contempt which the Scotchman felt for him. Latham knew that; and that was the basis of the trouble.

So far they had met nothing like hardship

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in the sense that men who go into the North understand hardship. Their hunt of the next day, for which Latham had enlisted, would be only an autumn jaunt to an Arctic traveller. In addition, it had none of the worry of necessity for bringing in the meat; for there was no real need of provisions for men or dogs. Fresh meat now was desired only as a delicacy. The plan of the expedition of course counted upon securing a certain number of food animals—bear or seals, if not caribou, and perhaps a musk ox or two; but the securing of this food would not for many months become a life-and-death matter.

Suppose real difficulties and privations were to be endured? How would Latham act then? Price still took pains to hide his temper and to appear to what advantage he might before Margaret; but, as if he no longer needed Geoff's help, or as if he recognised that his former ally had turned against him and defied Geoff to harm him with Margaret, Latham now had ceased to play a part before his cabin mate. But if Latham had forgotten how es-

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sential it was to keep up appearances in such a party, Geoff must remember.

He waited and listened till he heard Latham turn over as one awake and then he leaned over the edge of his bunk.

"Price," he called down quietly.

"What do you want?"

"I was a fool," Geoff apologised.

"I know it."

Geowff waited a moment to control himself and then forced it out: "Forgive me."

"Oh—all right."

Geoff turned back, less satisfied rather than more. His blood tingled hotly as he thought of this man having the power he now held over Margaret, and he, her brother, though she did not blame him, still was in some way to blame. He would never sleep if he thought of that; so he drove his mind back to reviewing the work he had been doing. An uncertainty came to him and he sat up.

"What's the matter now?" Latham asked sharply.

"I say, did you look over the rest of the tanks in the hold?"

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After Latham had almost finished his work, McNeal had told him to empty gasoline from a leaking tank into a whole one; and later had directed that all the tanks which might have been damaged by moving about boxes in the hold be examined.

"I looked at them," Latham said, irritated at the recollection.

"All right?"

"Of course they were all right."

Geoff subsided and sank back, and after a while went to sleep.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE BURNING OF THE VIBORG

WHAT time it was Geoffrey could not tell when he was awakened; but all was still black dark and the wind was shrieking outside when a scream, a man's scream of terrible alarm, startled him up. He listened for it again and it came with a word this time:

"Fire!"

It rang through the ship, and almost before it was uttered Geoff jumped down. He had got into his bunk with his clothes on, so he was dressed all but for his coat; his boots were against his feet as he sprang to the floor. He stooped and pulled them on.

"Fire!" he shouted, and now the smell of it told him the alarm he heard was real. "Price, fire!"

Latham was sitting up in his bunk. Geoff's hand, going out in the dark, found the man's shoulder.

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"I heard it," said Latham, and shook him off.

"The gasoline!" cried Geoff as he straightened. "Three thousand gallons of gasoline!" He beat on the partition between his cabin and his sister's. "Meg, are you up?" he called. "There's fire, do you hear?"

"I heard," his sister's voice came back strongly.

Geoff rushed out from the cabin and on to the deck. The tramp of feet and the commotion already had told him that the men from the stern of the ship were about. A black cloud of smoke, which he smelled and felt rather than saw at first, was rising from the engine-room. Now the red glare of a flame burst out below it and he saw men's big forms battling with buckets. He rushed to them to help; the apparatus and hose of the patent fire extinguisher tangled his feet. The extinguisher tanks were emptied; they had been tried and had been inefficient. McNeal, seeing Geoff, bawled to him to get into the bucket line. Overside on the ice, where he had chopped a hole, Linn was filling pails and handing them

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up to the fire fighters on the deck. Geoff seized one of these and threw it on the fire and Latham came up behind him.

It made too many men emptying the buckets for the one man filling them. McNeal's hand grasped Geoff's shoulder as he came to the rail and pushed him over to the ice.

"Help Linn!" the skipper commanded hoarsely, and Geoff bent to his work beside the cook. As he filled the pails through the ice and lifted them up, he counted the men snatching them from his hands and rushing with them away from the rail. There were five; all the men were there fighting the fire. Margaret came once to the rail with them, tried to raise a filled bucket, found that she could not and swiftly got herself out of the way. Geoff looked about as he lifted up the pails and no longer saw her; then toward the bow he heard the sound of something falling on the ice. The flame flared higher and in the terrible blazing light he saw Margaret throw over bundles of clothing and disappear to the forward cabins again for more.

There was no choice, as far as safety might

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be concerned, between her task in the still unblazing forward part of the ship and his and Linn's post on the ice at the ship's side. The flames in themselves were not the direct danger to any one; it was the tanks of gasoline—the hundreds and thousands of gallons still stored in the engine-room and the hold. They made the whole ship one great bomb, an explosive of total destruction for every one anywhere on board or near by, if the fire reached those tanks.

The fire was blazing hottest now in the engine-room, where the tanks lining the walls nearest the fire had been emptied by the demands of the engine. But the fire, in spite of all the water thrown upon it, no longer was blazing in the engine-room alone; it was creeping into the hold and burning among the boxes where the emptied spaces had made a chimney for the draft. There the gasoline was stored in great twenty and fifty and hundred gallon containers all about the sides of the ship. The flames were not yet blazing against them, but they could not be kept away for many more minutes. The two thousand eight hundred gallons of gasoline—as he stooped and dipped

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his buckets into the icy water desperately and straightened and handed up his buckets, seized the emptied ones and stooped and filled again, Geoff remembered the exact estimate of the amount remaining—two thousand eight hundred gallons of gasoline would go together.

Fear, terror, made him weak, and he dropped a pail he had filled. He tried not to think of it, but to work, work, work. As long as the men going down into the flaming hold would stay, he would stay. Linn, the cook, beside him, bent again and again steadily to his task. They could scarcely see each other now for the smoke, and could not see at all the men who seized the buckets from their hands. These groped, choking and calling for direction through the thick, black cloud. Geoff called back and Linn shouted beside him, and hands blundered down and felt for the filled buckets, lifted the weight from the men on the ice and went away. Either Geoff and Linn were working better or the smoke so slowed the work of the others that the buckets no longer were being emptied as fast as they could be filled; a row of full pails stood unseized upon

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the deck. Geoff yelled to the cook, sprang up and seized the bucket he had filled and took it and flung it on the fire.

Big, heavy men blundered by him, choking or calling direction and encouragement to each other. McNeal was there in the thick of it—big, hoarse-voiced McNeal, steady and swift with his strong arms. Michaelis, the Danish mate, fought beside him. Geoff made out Brunton and Koehler; then no more. The fifth man was not there now—Latham. Geoff could not see; he could not be sure; any one might be lost in the smoke. What had happened to Latham?

McNeal, as he passed now, missed him too and called for him.

"Latham!" his voice shouted. "Latham! Where are you? Are you all right? Latham, answer!"

He listened while he seized another pail of water and threw it, but no shout came back in return. McNeal shouted again; and after him Koehler.

"I saw him going down the last time I passed him," Koehler called.

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"To the hold?" demanded McNeal.

"Toward the hold," Koehler shouted.

McNeal emptied the bucket in his arms and seized a coat which had been flung on the deck. He bound it about his head.

"Keep on with the water, boys," he called. "I'm going down to look for him. Geoff," he turned and commanded, "get your sister away! The *Viborg* goes any minute now! Get that girl away!"

He dived into the thickest of the smoke and disappeared.

It was plain indeed that the ship must soon go—in any minute, as the captain said. The fire was gaining steadily. How near it was to the gasoline tanks could only be guessed, but it must be very near. There was no longer a chance of saving the ship, that was clear; but the men with the buckets would not yet admit it. Geoff dropped his pail and turned forward to look for his sister. In one way he had forgotten her while he worked with the water; in another way he had been thinking of her. There was no use in taking her away from the ship if the others all were to stay and be lost

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with it. It would mean for her merely slow death alone by starvation or freezing if the men and the ship were lost, instead of the instant destruction and annihilation with them when the fire reached the gasoline. But he stumbled forward to find her. He groped through the smoke and his hands found a figure.

"Meg!" he called.

"Geoff!" her recognition came back.

"Get off the ship!"

"When you all do!" she returned to him firmly.

"We're going in a minute—right away. Meg! Think of the gasoline!"

"I know!" She had her arms full with a bundle she was saving; she flung it out on the ice. "But I don't go till you do!"

McNeal's voice shouting in hoarse, choking command rang over the ship.

"Everybody get away! Get away!" he bawled. "The fire's got to the tanks; they're heating. Get away!" And he disappeared again below.

"What's he going down again for?" Mar-

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garet called, fighting Geoff as he tried to put her away.

"For Latham—he's missing. Koehler thought he might be in the hold."

Geoff felt his sister's grasp become convulsive on his arm.

"Call him back, Geoff!" she cried. "Oh, call him back! Price isn't below. Call him back!"

"Where is he?" said Geoff.

"Call him up—call McNeal up!" she implored wildly. "Tell him Latham's off the ship. I know it!"

Geoff dashed back into the smoke clouding from the hold.

"Jerry!" he shouted. "McNeal! Jerry, Latham isn't there. Come up. He isn't there!"

"Sure?" came from the hold.

"Come up!" Geoff reached down and his hand caught McNeal's and pulled him up.

"Off the ship!" he shouted then, as he came up through the smoke. "Everybody away! Get off! The fire's got to the gasoline!"

McNeal stooped and picked up something from the deck; then going round the little ship he saw that no one else stayed. He drove Geoff

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off before him and jumped down on the ice.

The flames burst higher from the little Viborg and threw over the ice about a ghastly glow of flaring red, a glowing circle that showed the scurrying figures of the *Viborg's* little company stumbling away over the ice.

"Father away! Faster!" McNeal made a trumpet of his hands and commanded; and the flames ran up the masts from below and flared out in the rigging. Then a roar and flash from lower down, and a mighty burst of blue, exploding flame smothered over the red and hurled through the air all about great billets of burning wood. A greater burst of flame followed this; and forward and astern, as the first exploding tanks blew up and lit the rest, the gasoline flew into flame, shattering and strewing the little wooden ship into fragments of fire, which shot high into the Arctic night and were scattered in all four directions far over the ice, while the ship burst and burst again with the detonation of the tanks till the last blue eruption strewed the deck boards, bits of beams and spars of the *Viborg* into blazing heaps or streaking splinters spluttering on the frozen sea.

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CHAPTER XV

MARGARET EXPLAINS FOR PRICE

FOR a moment after the last explosion, as for the instant following the bursting of the first tank, the rush of the flaming gas seemed to smother the fire in the wooden hulk. But at once the red and yellow flames leaped up again, finishing their work of destruction of the oil-soaked wreckage of the ship and the supplies left in the frame of the hull. Figures, fiercely fighting to save some of these, came close and hacked holes in the ice through which to dip the buckets they had kept and get water to throw upon the roaring blaze.

These men were plainly recognisable in the glare from the flame. Latham was among them, Geoff saw; but some one was missing; there were only six.

He recognised Koehler next to him, and was about to call to ask him who the missing man

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might be when the doctor dropped his bucket and demanded of him instead:

"Where's McNeal?"

The skipper was the one not there.

"Where's McNeal?" Koehler called to others.

They ceased their useless work and looked about. McNeal certainly was missing.

A little distance from the ship in every direction big splinters of spars, broken boxes, other material scattered from the *Viborg* by the bursting of the tanks, blazed and smouldered on the ice. Beside one of these glowing piles lay a dark figure stretched out which, as Koehler recognised with a cry, was the figure of a man. He ran to it and stooped, pulling it away from the burning wood beside which it lay, and with his hands the doctor crushed out the sparks that still gleamed in the charred clothing.

"It's McNeal!" he announced to the others. He bent and made a quick examination. "He's not dead!" The doctor voiced his relief. "He must have been struck by that." He motioned to the burning wood scattered by the explosion

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of the tanks. "It knocked him out and set his clothes on fire; but there's still life in him."

Indeed, while the doctor worked with him the skipper of the burning ship stirred. As sensation first returned to him he writhed with the pain of his burns and cried out; then recovering himself, he opened his eyes and saw his ship blazing, and about him the faces of his crew.

"Go back!" he screamed to them hoarsely. "Get back and save what you can!" His voice cracked as he tried by his tone to enforce his command. "Every man get back there. I'm all right."

The doctor could do all that might be done for McNeal at that moment; so the other five went back to the ship, leaving only the girl with the injured man and physician. Yet the return of the rest nearer to the ship proved useless. The whole hulk of the *Viborg* was in flames, devouring food, supplies and gear, and cartridges popped in the blaze. All about the ship on the ice were boxes or fragments of boxes and other material scattered by the explosions. Most of these piles were burning, so

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the five men went about smothering these fires before they returned to the ship to watch, helplessly, the burning down of the fire till they could come close enough to poke and rake under the charred timbers of the smoking ruins for such supplies as might not have been destroyed entirely.

As the light of the fire diminished, the slow, dull dawn of the Arctic day was breaking. Koehler, having done what he could for McNeal, left the skipper in Margaret's care and joined the others about the ruin of the ship. Solemnly and silently the six searched the charcoal and ashes. As the daylight strengthened, Geoff for the first time considered his own state and saw the condition of the others. He was blackened from head to foot with smoke and smudge; his hands had been burned, the pain shooting up his arms at every move, and his fingers twinged and gave him agony. But his burns were nothing compared to those of Brunton and Michaelis. These men, however, worked beside him without mentioning their hurts even to each other. Michaelis merely turned his face away when some twinge

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of pain threatened to make him grimace; and Brunton, defying his hurts to disable him, hummed loudly to himself between his gasps.

Amid a smouldering heap Koehler now found a box of surgical supplies and medicine, most of which had been saved by the heavy steel case. He brought it to where McNeal lay on the ice wrapped up in a blanket and watched by Margaret.

Doctor Koehler treated McNeal's burns, then turned to attend to the others.

As Koehler required each man to be examined Geoff found himself estimating each by his hurts. Not only Brunton and Michaelis but Linn too had suffered seriously. Koehler himself was burned about his hands and face. Beside these Geoff felt shame as he came up. Latham did not come for examination at all. As Margaret rose from beside McNeal, Latham met her and they walked a little away. Geoff followed them and came close as they halted. He heard his sister speaking.

"You were overcome by smoke when they missed you," she was saying to Price. "I found you unconscious on the deck and pulled

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you up and got you down on the ice. Do you see? I got you down on the ice and you came to yourself there. That was how it was, Price!"

Geoff came no nearer. At first but one idea possessed him. Latham had deserted when the fire began getting dangerous; and Margaret was arranging for him an explanation of his absence when McNeal, believing he was below, had twice gone down to the hold to get him. Then as Geoff heard Margaret repeat her explanation it seemed rather that she must be telling Price what really had happened, and that Price had been overcome, as she said, and confused as to what had occurred till she now told him. Yet as Geoff recalled Margaret's words in the last moment before they abandoned the ship the first idea again seized him.

Geoff retreated from them. Latham and Margaret turned back to the others and, rejoining them, repeated their tale, which no one questioned. Indeed, it was not strange if Price had been overcome by smoke. Rather it was remarkable that the others, having taken the risks they had, still had escaped. For another period Geoff's doubts were removed; and yet

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again they returned. He could not mention them to any one else either to dismiss or to confirm them. If Latham really had been overcome and helpless, Geoff could not be forgiven for suggesting another idea; and if Price and Margaret were now lying it was better to let the lie stand.

What did Margaret's action mean if she was lying for Price and, knowing he had run away, was defending him before the others? It must mean that Margaret, having given Latham her word to be his wife, already was acting in spirit as his wife. What he did, she did; his honour had become her honour; and she, as his wife, not only would not bear witness against him but would deceive and lie to save him.

As Geoff realised this he knew that his sister would not tell him the truth about Latham even if he asked her. Margaret, when she gave her word to Price, had drawn away from the rest, even from her brother. She made herself one with Latham. Nothing more convincing could have told Geoff that when she pleaded for continuance of the search for Eric Hedon

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it had been without hope of finding him for herself.

Geoff, his burns dressed, set himself with the others to gathering together and counting up such salvage from the fire as might prevent their calamity from becoming complete. Besides, there was immediate need of setting up a shelter for McNeal.

The very small part of their stores that had been sent ashore the day before of course had been saved. If these had been selected with any anticipation of immdiate disaster they would have been better chosen; as it was, the men had taken off the first boxes that offered. Several of these contained dog feed; also there were a few cakes of pemmican and a few cans of fuel. These cans were the greatest treasures, as all the oil left on the ship had been burned. One portable aluminum stove was recovered in repairable condition. Of other essential supplies they regained a case of cartridges and a few rifles not seriously damaged. All the clothing had been destroyed except the little Margaret had saved from the forward cabins. The lack of skin clothing was most

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serious, and scarcely less so was the loss of the skins and materials for proper tents. Every one wore the garments he had worn the day before; but these were not Arctic winter clothing. Moreover, McNeal's clothes had been burned on him; and Brunton's and Michaelis' outer garments were charred through. Inventory showed that after patching and repairing all that had been saved, there was scarcely a single suitable winter outfit for each person. There were blankets that might be used as substitutes for the lost tents.

The seven dogs that survived out of the twenty-six taken from Greenland had been put ashore the day before and therefore were safe, and so were three sledges. After all food and other supplies had been gathered and inspected it was estimated that there might be proper provision and fuel for the whole party for something like two months.

"Of course that means," Koehler said quietly, as they finished bringing up the salvage to the station on the shore, "that we can't go through the winter on what we have.

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We've either got to live off this land or move to land we can live on."

"Live off the land?" Geoff repeated, looking up over the snow-streaked black rocks. If the caribou hunt had seemed to him fruitless yesterday when it was suggested to provide a delicacy for the party, now such a hunt as a necessity was dismaying. "I don't believe even an Eskimo can live here."

"Then we have to find where they are living and live like them—get our clothing as well as food from animals."

By unspoken consent Koehler had assumed command of the party after McNeal was disabled. The skipper was conscious continuously now and quite clear in his head but entirely unable to move himself. When he was brought into the hut built from the wreckage of the ship the operation was agony. Koehler would not commit himself as to how long it must be before McNeal might be about. Brunton kept on his feet and did his best to work, but it was plain that he would be of little use for a long time; and Michaelis used only one arm. But as these injured men went about

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their work, neither on that day of disaster nor later did Geoff hear any man inquire or complain as to who might have been to blame, by neglect or otherwise, for the fire. And Geoff understood the reason for that. The one who was to blame, must remain with the small party now facing privation, perhaps death, on account of the fault which caused the fire. It must be more than enough for that man himself to realise it. To bear besides even the silent censure of the others would be unendurable.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE STONE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS

GEOFF often wondered what the others thought; for though they might not once speak of it, they must be thinking. To Geoff himself the cause of the fire was plain. It had broken out just where the heat of a lamp or spontaneous combustion from the oil of cleaning rags would have ignited gasoline leaking from the tanks which McNeal had ordered Latham to examine, and which Latham had said were all right when Geoff reminded him of them after their quarrel the evening before.

All day they worked, building the shelter of stones and wood and walling it up with such boxes and cans of their supplies as they had saved. Later in the winter, in an extremity, they might become Eskimos in the plan of their shelters; but now, building from the material of the ship, they divided their hut into two rooms for temporary occupation. With not

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enough dogs for two teams, with McNeal helpless and Brunton and Michaelis in bad shape, thought of transport to another position was impossible for the present. Hopeless as the land looked, they must stay there for the present and do their best to live off the country. That day for the first time there was actual suffering in the party. As they gathered for meals—McNeal, who was unable to sit up, was fed by Koehler or Margaret—for the first time the food had become rations, dealt out no longer without stint and in amounts up to inclination or appetite, but in measured portions estimated by Koehler as each one's proper allowance. And there were no more generous scraps and leavings to throw to the dogs, but these were fed as carefully from the supplies set aside for them.

Joking about measured portions was better than silence in pretended disregard of the new situation; but the jests, though made lightly, brought up always a vision of the few counted weeks in which food was sure. The jokes became forced and soon ceased. That night, as the wind howled without, it blew the snow no

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longer against the stout sides of a ship, but through the crevices and cracks in the walls and roof of an unsteady hut; and Geoff at least shivered as he lay at the end of the row of the seven in the larger room. Of what was his sister thinking alone in her little room just beyond?

Definitely that day she had identified herself with Latham. By her attitude now she made it impossible for any one, even her brother, to take her part against Price. Geoff remembered his speculation of just twenty-four hours before as to how Latham would face real hardship. Well, apparently that was about to be tried out.

The next morning he and Price, as the most active of the party, took the best two rifles and set out on the hunt. The temperature was well down toward zero, but with the day the wind again had gone down. As the two tramped over the snow-covered ground the day was not distinctly colder or in itself more uncomfortable than some when these two had hunted together for moose in the woods of New Brunswick or of Maine. There they had spent many

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days as vainly, in respect to getting game, as the days during which they hunted here; but there was no sport in this hunting. In place of the missing sense of sport Geoff felt a thrill and stir at the thought of the needs of the party looking to his rifle for food supply; but this did not in the same way seem to seize Latham. Geoff could not tell how Price might have acted if they had found game; for day after day they went out, separated, and each hunted alone farther and farther from the camp, but returned always after darkness with nothing or almost nothing.

"Saw some funny little whitish things like calcimined prairie dogs to-day," Geoff reported as he returned weary after a long day which had taken him many miles from the hut.

"Good. Next time you see them bring them in," Koehler directed.

"What are they?"

"Lemmings."

"What're they?"

"If you must know, a sort of ground rat; but call 'em lemmings. It sounds better and we may be eating them."

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The partly crippled men had set hooks through holes in the ice. They got some fish, but only a few. There were no signs of seals and, therefore, no bears on that part of the coast. On certain days Koehler substituted for either Geoff or Latham in the hunt. He had no better luck except in the matter of bringing in lemmings.

Each day the hunters kept a lookout for cairns; and each night, as they returned, Margaret questioned them whether they had seen any heaps of stones or sign that any man had passed. She never forgot this; but asked now merely in the manner of a loyal friend deeply concerned. Geoff, watching Latham, saw that her thought of Eric now stirred Latham as never before. The fact that Margaret had promised herself to Price and had shown in her attitude that she considered herself cut off from Hedon, though they found him, seemed only to increase Latham's jealousy.

But no cairn and no sign of any man's passing was discovered except once. Geoff and Koehler had been hunting all day together. Mile after mile they had marched over the bar-

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rens down the coast without sign on sea or shore of any life or of anything that stirred except the snow as the wind circled and sucked it up. They had chosen a direction of travel not taken by either of them before, but along the coast where Latham had hunted alone.

"He's right about this shore." Geoff referred to Latham, speaking to Koehler. "It's the most God-forsaken bit I've dreamed of; and since coming up here I've added considerably to my material for God-forsaken dreams."

Koehler smiled. "I don't think any animal, much less any people, ever could exist here."

Koehler led on quietly. The coast there was deeply indented, with rises of rock on the capes making bold headlands to be seen from far off. The doctor pointed to a cape ahead.

"Take your glasses," he directed, "and see what's on that point. No, I don't mean to look for any moving thing," he said, as Geoff whipped out his binoculars. "Is that a cairn there or what?"

"A pile of stones certainly!" said Geoff, handing the glasses over; "but not exactly like a cairn. Do you make it out?"

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"No," said Koehler, screwing down the glasses and swiftly leading the way toward the object.

A heap of stones it certainly was, and an artificial heap; but also it was not a cairn. The snow had drifted up about it so as to cover two sides; then, coming close and allowing for the shape of the pile under the snow, Geoff saw what the object was.

"A stone house!" he cried in astonishment to Koehler.

The doctor nodded and went up to examine it. A stone house indeed it was, standing all by itself on that grim, rocky point. It was about ten feet square, with a dome-shaped top and a door that was drifted full of snow. Plainly it was old, very old, and had not been occupied—or at least it had not been restored or rebuilt—for many decades; or, since time works changes slowly in the Arctic, that stone house might have stood in that condition for a century as well as for a decade. If it had been there a century, so also might it have looked over that Arctic ice a thousand years ago. There was absolutely nothing to denote its age

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or when last it had been inhabited. There it stood alone on that dreary grey coast; and as far as the eye could see in either direction there was not another structure or sign of habitation. The utter loneliness and desertion of it in that white waste brought Geoff's shoulders up in a shudder.

"What is it?" he appealed to Koehler. "An old Eskimo house?"

The doctor shook his head. "No Eskimos ever built that or lived in it. You've seen their summer tents in North Greenland; and you know in winter they live in snow igloos."

"Then who built it?"

"The Eskimos say spirits."

"Spirits?"

"Yes. What does it remind you of?"

"Remind me?"

"Yes; think of Greeland."

The mention of Greenland brought recollections. The stone house was in some features very like some dwellings that had interested him. Now he knew.

"Doctor, that's the sort of house the old Norsemen built in Greenland. That's the way

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the lost people of Greenland built on the hills behind Julianehaab!"

"Exactly," Koehler said. "I wanted to know if you'd see it. It's been commented on before."

"About this house?"

"As far as I know no one's ever seen this house before. Of course, I mean white people, modern white people. But there are other single, lonely stone houses like this in other places in the North. Amundsen saw one; Stefansson passed one south of here; others have reported them. They all agree that these aren't Eskimo houses; and the Eskimos who see them say the same. And, more than that, you can't get an Eskimo to go near them.

"The Eskimos call these the stone houses of the spirits and say that powerful spirits, the tunrak, built them before human beings came."

Geoff stooped and broke with his hand through the drift in the doorway. He felt down through the snow to the ground and found some objects there. He wrenched something free and brought it up. It was a stone and he dropped it and felt under the snow

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again. He brought up another stone and then he found something different. It was frozen so hard into the ground that he broke it as he jerked it away. He brushed the snow and dirt away from it, staring as he tried to make out what it could have been. It was a queer little implement of copper and wood, a round wooden bit about two inches long with a wheel of copper at one end.

For a moment Koehler and Geoff studied it with bewilderment, trying to identify the little implement with some use that it might have had in the hands of the builders of the lonely stone house. Then Koehler took it and holding it in his hands pointed out its use.

"Geoff, it's half an empty spool of a film camera!"

"What?"

Koehler repeated. Geoff still gazed dazedly. With his mind filled with thoughts of the ancient people of Greenland he was slow to recognise his find. His senses came to him and he knew that any bit of wood not left recently must have decayed; he saw the object was what Koehler had said, half of the spool upon

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which is rolled the film of a hand camera. As he himself exposed a roll of film and prepared his camera for another, he had seen scores of such little wooden and copper spools. And here, lying in this hut was one of them, which must have been manufactured in the state of New York within a few years.

Some one taking a snapshot had used up a film roll there, broken the spool, thrown it away after changing films, and gone on.

Geoff stooped again excitedly as he realised that and struggled through the drifted snow for some other object. He found the other half of the spool, which had been broken off; then nothing more rewarded him.

"Who dropped that, doctor?" he demanded, as he fitted the two halves together. "Who could have dropped that? Eric Hedon? Doc, who if not Eric?"

"That certainly was the size and pattern of the spool that fitted our cameras on the *Aurora,*" Koehler said.

"Then Eric Hedon's been here?"

"And that," the doctor looked at the hut,

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"is certainly the sort of subject he'd use his films on."

They separated and searched under the snow about the house. In front of the hut, on the edge of a cliff, there seemed to be something under the snow to have caught a drift. Geoff examined and found only some scattered stones; a few feet off another patch of stones. He was leaving them, when all at once he realised the relation of the groups. The patches of stones were not cairns, but they lay in a line north and south, fifteen feet apart, the larger to the north! They were not cairns, but they might have been. If cairns, they had been built in the *Aurora* arrangement.

Geoff called the doctor's attention to it and together they searched the piles of rock.

"If they ever were cairns," Koehler summed up as they finally ceased to search, "these didn't tumble like that one on Mason Land. These were thrown down."

Geoff met him. "I got that too."

Was all that loneliness playing tricks with them? The spool under the snow told that some white man surely had passed there re-

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cently. If it had been Eric, had he built cairns there? Who then had thrown them down, destroying or taking away any message that might have lain there? Latham had hunted many days in that direction. It was strange if he had not seen the hut. If he had seen the hut, why had he not mentioned it?

The same thought was going through both men's minds at that moment; neither had need to suggest it more plainly to the other. And that thought betrayed others. Geoff betrayed one.

"When we were looking for cairns farther north, how much ground did Latham cover that no one else went over?" he asked.

"A good deal," Koehler replied quietly.

What were they thinking of? Could Latham have found Hedon's cairns on the island to the north and destroyed them without reporting? Their present discovery might cut very deep, and again it might all be a mistake. They hurried back to camp and showed the spool they had found. Of the patches of stone Koehler directed that nothing yet be said.

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Latham had not seen the house; he had not gone that far.

"Then Eric did come this way," Margaret said simply, as Geoff gave her the broken spool. She needed to say no more to make plain that never yet had she thought of Eric as lost. The discovery of the film spool merely meant to her that they were upon the same route that Eric had travelled.

And the next day, if the hours of grey twilight about noon now could be called day, the party broke camp and set out for the south. The complete failure to find game in the vicinity made it certain that any move must bring betterment. McNeal still was in no shape to travel; but now he could bear being drawn on a sledge. Brunton was partially disabled, but he could hold the pace of the sledge travel if not called upon for much help. So the seven dogs were divided, four to one sledge with Michaelis to pull with them, three to a second with Linn to help. Brunton accompanied Linn to guide the sledge in emergency. Koehler, Latham and Geoff, without dogs to aid, made the team for the third sledge,

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upon which McNeal was taken. Margaret accompanied this sledge to care for the sick man and in tight places give what aid she might.

The amount of provision, fuel and equipment remaining required at the start an extra relay of a sledge. So as the sledges started south over the sea ice along the shore the next morning, on the first trips they bore food and tents. They set up the tents and built snow shelters about them on the site of the new camp; then, returning, the one sledge brought up more supplies and another dragged McNeal to the shelters made ready for him. They travelled with two tents; and after that first day they always left the helpless man in one of the tents till the other was set up and banked with snow at the next point in advance.

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CHAPTER XVII

"WE SHOT A MAN"

BETWEEN the two tents they divided evenly into four and four at night. The arrangement which Margaret herself had suggested and which was accepted was that she and Geoff and McNeal and Koehler should share one shelter, while Latham, Brunton, Michaelis and Linn took the other near by."

"I can help best by taking care of McNeal," Margaret said. "I'm in the same position as a trained nurse with my patient and his doctor and my brother in a hospital. There's nothing out of the way in a girl at home doing what I'm doing among men; and much less is that the case here."

So she did her part and permitted no special consideration. Protest by Latham amounted to nothing; and in the days that followed Geoff witnessed more and more evidences of his sister's sense and strength. Physically—that is,

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in her inability to right a loaded sledge that had overturned—she was lacking in power in comparison to the others; but her endurance of cold and fatigue was at least as great as that of the strongest. In first assigning measured rations Koehler had made Margaret's allowance the same as that of the men; but immediately she had cut down her portion. Now with hard, continuous trudging and sometimes tugging the sledge over rough ice, she thrived on half the amount given to each of the men.

Slowly but steadily the supplies on the sledges diminished as fuel was burned and food eaten. Even the dim grey twilight, which was the day, was failing; and the weather was colder and colder. Koehler, superintending the packing of the sledges, got all the remaining provisions and gear upon the first two sledges and on the third with McNeal. There no longer was need for even one sledge to make a relay.

"This means faster going now!" said Koehler, trying to cheer them as he and Geoff and Latham got into the harness to pull.

Latham shook his head. "We'll be lucky to

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keep up the pace with one trip that we did with two."

It was merely admitting that they were all losing strength. The dogs, though still being fed their prepared ration, tired even more quickly than the men. Upon that march the three men with the last sledge soon caught up with Linn and his three dogs, then with Michaelis and his four, though at first these had had no trouble in keeping ahead. The day scarcely lightened to twilight; only the chance that the sky was clear and the stars shining bright gave them light to pick their way for the first hours of the march. At two o'clock, by the watch Koehler carried, the sky clouded over and light was gone. A blizzard with black, blinding snow suddenly blew down from the north. The three men in harness, who had been making the trail, were half a mile ahead of the other sledges when the total darkness came. At once they stopped and made camp. McNeal had been on the sledge with Margaret marching beside him. While they threw up a snow shelter they shouted to guide the three men with the other two sledges; but both passed

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and circled before, after three hours, the whole party was together again.

The storm kept up, and under such conditions further travel was impossible. Even at noon light failed to penetrate the clouds; the world without the two tiny tents, now made into snow igloos, was all black wilderness. Only a crack of yellow light sometimes shone on the snow, which covered everything, to prove it was really white and not all inky like the sky. The dogs huddled close between the tents, buried in the snow.

Sixteen days this great black blizzard blew, days separated from each other only by recording the moving of the hands of a watch. The eight, crowded in their cramped shelters, cooked their rations over oil stoves and ate their food three times a day at intervals indicated by the watches. When the third of these times was passed and the watch told that it would be twelve hours before cooking a meal again, they stretched out and tried to go to sleep.

But sleep during such nights was slower and slower to come. The insomnia which attacks those confined and inactive in the long Arctic

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night seized Geoff at once; it mastered also McNeal and Koehler stretched out beside him. From the other shelter Geoff heard the sound of talk and sometimes the shrillness of argument during the hours which the watches said were night; and he knew the men there were sleepless too.

They tried to fight this sleeplessness; and in those periods of the darkness still called daytime they tied sledge ropes together and each in turn went out and, with one end of the rope fast in the tent, tramped away from the shelter and up and down, holding the other end of the rope, till the cold exhausted him. But still this brought no sleep.

Margaret, clothed in her Eskimo garments, took this exercise like the men; but she alone did not need it. Through the endless periods known as nights she lay just beyond Geoff, quietly and evenly breathing. He put out an arm sometimes and touched her gently; then he lay a long time wondering about her.

In a way she was the cause of all the hardship suffered, the dangers passed through, the death possibly but little ahead. She was to

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blame for bringing the party up there, but no one of the men who had been on the *Aurora*—not even McNeal at any moment of his suffering—showed sign of regret that she had made them come. On the contrary, when Geoff heard them mention the matter at all it was with shame that it had required her faith and determination to return them to the North for the rescue of their missing comrades. She had shown to them that Thomas and Hedon had not died, as they had supposed, but both had lived to reach Mason Land; and it was at least possible that Eric Hedon still was alive. They still might find him; but if they did, with their food all but gone and with a more alarming scarcity of fuel, they could not help him much. If he had any supplies at all he more likely would have to aid them. But it was more probable that Hedon, if he still were living, had descended the coast of this Victoria Land months before and reached the whalers or trading ships which sometimes came from Alaska into Coronation Gulf.

The *Viborg* party could not hope to follow that far without more food and fuel. Their

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hope during each march, while they dragged themselves south along the coast, had been to find the Eskimos supposed to be somewhere on those shores. But after each march the Eskimos and the land and strip of sea where food might be found still were somewhat ahead—always ahead, vaguely retreating before them as they exhausted themselves in their effort to advance, mocking them and drawing them on.

To Geoff, born and brought up under conditions in which he never could have considered actual want or lack of food as possible, it sometimes was incredible that he and his sister and the others would starve or freeze, actually die, from having no food and no fuel to keep them warm, after the last small supplies on their sledges were gone. The cutting down of their rations and their other discomforts still often seemed to Geoff as a voluntary matter, which they could end or alter at their will. Then at other moments the terrible reality of starvation stared like a spectre before him; he felt himself weak, cold, dying, and the realness of their necessity, their desperate extremity, overwhelmed him. He could understand how these

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same experiences of feeling must be seizing Latham. The man's ten years' advantage of Geoff gave Price no advantage in ability to bear their present privations. Rather Latham's longer possession of every luxury and of power to provide for himself left him more unable to understand that now he was helpless, that unless some fortune that he could not control should favour the party, he would starve, actually die from lack of food.

The realisation of this, when it came to Latham, sometimes frightened him as it did Geoff, but at other moments it angered him and made him burst out with ugly exasperation and rage that he could be threatened so. Geoff overheard expressions of this sometimes in the words which came to him in the night from the other shelter through the snow tunnel that connected the two.

"What did you expect?" Linn's voice was saying sarcastically in return to something from Latham. "A hot and cold bath and coffee and cantaloupe in the morning, sir?" Linn now was mimicking the subservience of a club waiter.

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"Shut up!" commanded Latham hotly.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir. Very good, sir!" Linn jeered on.

Latham's reply was inarticulate; evidently it was some action, for Michaelis sharply cried: "Look out!"

At the same moment Geoff felt McNeal's bandaged hand grasp him.

"Go in and stop that!" the skipper whispered hoarsely; and Koehler already was moving. But before either got to the tunnel, Brunton, in the other shelter, had interfered and quiet, if not peace, was restored. Geoff lay back in silence, thinking.

One fact was absolutely clear to him: If the party got through all right, some one was going to pay Latham for what he had endured. Geoff tingled hot in the rage of his helplessness as he realised what must be the result if, after all they had borne and might still endure, they got home safe. Latham would hold Margaret to her pledge; of that he was certain. Whether or not they found Eric Hedon, or upon return learned that he had reached civilisation safely, Latham would require his recom-

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pense from Margaret; and Geoff knew that his sister would force herself to pay.

Yet she was able to sleep. What peace could there be in her mind? Did she believe now that she was to die and was she content to give her life in the search for the man she loved?

Twenty-eight hours later, or about nine in the morning of the second day after this, the blizzard at last blew out; by noon the stars were shining and by three in the afternoon the moon appeared and spread its clear green light over the snow-clad world. All the party—McNeal with help now could limp a few steps—stood out before the snow shelters and looked over the land and sea.

The wind had gone down; it was still and very cold, and in all the world about there was no sign or stir of life. Everywhere was the glistening, green, shimmering snow. But the land and that shore of the sea seemed as favourable as any they had found or now were likely to reach for supplying them with food. There was no sense in spending their last strength in pushing on to another spot as bare as this. So instead of harnessing the dogs to

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the sleds Koehler took the beasts out over the ice. Four of the seven had been trained by Eskimos to smell seal holes in the ice under the snow. The doctor had tried the dogs at other camps without success; but now they had to find something.

In the same spirit Geoff took one of the best rifles; Latham took the other; Brunton bore the third gun, which had been repaired. They had hunted for weeks with the knowledge that soon their lives must be dependent upon their getting animals for food, but their want no longer was in the future; it was upon them. Geoff, as he hunted, felt the gnawing of hunger and the easy exhaustion from reduced rations. He searched for sight of something moving somewhere with sudden, unforewarned brute readiness to shoot and spring after the shot, to rush upon his quarry and tear it to pieces.

It was the second moonlit "day" of this hunt on the edge of the ice, while Koehler still led his dogs over the frozen sea in the vain hope of smelling a seal, that Geoff at last saw something away to the south. He stood and stared,

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sick and trembling. The "buck ague" he had felt when, in Maine, he had sighted his first big game was nothing to the weakness that assailed him now as he made certain of seeing a large animal and watched it come on.

Both Latham and Michaelis happened to be within hearing, but he was afraid yet to cry a warning lest, after all their weeks of nothing, his eyes were tricking him and the object far away over the ice was only an hallucination. Then he called and pointed it out.

The others saw it too. It was very far away and indistinct in the moonlight; but they saw it climb up over a ridge of ice and slip down. It disappeared behind a hummock; and as Geoff stared he was beginning to believe that after all his eyes had tricked him when it clambered up and showed itself again. Instantly the three men hid. The animal was up the wind, so no scent from them could betray them. It was coming toward them and they crept cautiously to meet it.

"A bear!" Latham now confirmed Geoff's recognition.

"Bear!" repeated Brunton, almost in awe.

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The animal continued to come toward them, showing itself now huge, almost monstrous, as it stood erect on the top of an ice ridge and, seeming doubtful of its direction, looked round. Then it slipped down, disappeared and came in sight again, always closer.

The three hunters, creeping toward it with rifles ready, exchanged their guesses of the pounds of meat it meant. They separated a little to trap the beast and half surrounded it as it came on. It now was within long-range rifle fire; but the moon was low, and with the long dark shadows the light was tricky and they might overguess or underreckon the range by hundreds of yards. The bear still was coming toward them, so they could afford to wait.

Then the baying of a dog behind them brought them about; another dog gave tongue, and from the rear, where Koehler had been leading the brutes over the ice, five of the beasts burst by. They had scented the bear and were rushing to meet it. Brunton shouted to them loudly, but they went on.

The bear had not yet noticed the dogs. In another moment they must be upon him and

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either send him scurrying away or, if he stood at bay, he must destroy the hunger-weakened dogs as they came up. They were gaunt, slow, in no shape to dodge quickly or to give fight. The big animal came up over another ice ridge. The three hunters called to each other, crouched, aimed and fired almost together, then fired again and again. The big animal seemed not struck by the first fire; only the roar of the rifles or now the noise of the dogs seemed to reach him.

He stopped and stood erect, a straight, distinct target, and the rifles rang out again. The tall beast toppled and fell. He tumbled forward and slipped down the side of the ridge. As he slid slowly the rifles emptied to make sure of the game; then the dogs rushed close and were upon the animal.

"Got him!" Latham cried.

"Got him!" Geoff echoed, exultant.

Brunton wasted no words. "The dogs! They'll tear it up. Quick!"

The three ran, stumbling and slipping over the hummocks. The dogs indeed had reached their quarry. The men could hear them snar-

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ling and fighting together behind the hummock back of which the bear had slid. The hunters ran closer and saw the dogs. They were not tearing the animal that had been shot. Two of the beasts seemed giving battle to the other three to keep them away from the still heap on the ice; the two large dogs fought off the three and themselves made no effort to tear the bear, but circled, uglily snarling and watching the other brutes.

Brunton bawled to these to call them off; the dogs came a little away and then ran back. The bear now seemed not so huge as when it stood on the ridge. It was much smaller, and as the hunters came closer and the moonlight showed it against the snow it was not so white.

Indeed, it was dark and with one paw—which was not a paw at all but a skin-clothed arm—stretching away from the body.

"Man!" Geoff cried hoarsely, and stumbled forward. "A man! We shot a man!"

"Man!" Brunton roared as he ran up. The dogs now were about him and obeyed.

"Man?" Latham cried.

They all now saw a rifle, which had been

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slung over the man's shoulders, lying on the ice beside him; the man was on his face as he had fallen. He was garbed in skin clothing of the ordinary type of the northern Eskimo; the hood covered the back of his head; his hands were in mittens. A dark blotch of blood, flowing from somewhere under his hood, made a pool on the ice; and he lay very still. Now that the men had come up the dogs stood quieted, watching. The two largest smelled beside the body and sniffed, and looked up and put their noses down and sniffed again. Geoff recognised these two dogs and remembered that they were the two of their teams which had been on the *Aurora*.

"A man with a gun!" Geoff cried, and with the help of the other two he turned the body over.

The limbs fell dully and the body was all weight, inert. The blood from the wound in the head had already frozen in a dark streak down one side of the face. The blood hid the face above the brow and about the chin; but it was a face that one who had seen it would not forget. The eyes were closed—the good, blue

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eyes always direct, eager, interested; the lips were tight shut and the cheeks were thin, but—there was no doubt of his identity.

"Eric Hedon!" Geoff gasped. "Eric Hedon! We shot Eric!"

He heard the hard breathing and the groan of Brunton beside him. Geoff stared into Brunton's face and then at Latham. The man stared back at him; and for the moment there was sense in neither face. Then Latham looked down again.

"It is Eric Hedon," he said.

How he had come there, travelling alone over the ice to the north, they could not ask; he lay heavily, a weight in their arms.

A figure approached from the direction of the camp; it was Koehler following the dogs. He had heard the shots and probably seen the quarry fall. The three men looked at each other; then, leaving Hedon to the others, Geoff rose and went to meet the doctor. Koehler began running eagerly, thinking that game had been taken.

"Good work, Geoff!" he hailed. "You got him?"

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"Oh, doctor!" Geoff called. "Come quick!"

Koehler caught the tone; it was the cry of need for his help as a physician.

"What's happened? Who's hurt?" he asked.

"Hedon!"

"Hedon?"

"Doctor—Eric Hedon!"

"What?"

"That's Eric! We shot him. He's dead!"

The surgeon came up and saw. The others had no more to tell him; he had witnessed all that they had done. He took the body from Brunton's arms and pulled the hood farther back. A gush of blood flowed over the frozen streak as the physician worked; he felt under the coat and looked up.

"There may be a chance!" Koehler whispered.

"Of life?"

"I'll see." The doctor felt skilfully over the wound in the head; then he looked up. "Unless you've hit him somewhere else he may live!"

"May live?"

"We'll know better in a moment."

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Silently Brunton aided the surgeon in a swift search for other wounds.

"That's all!" Koehler cried at last. "I believe the bullet only grazed his skull. I don't think it pierced at all or fractured. Maybe it only stunned him. The cold stopped the blood."

Indeed as they spoke together the wounded man seemed to be sensible of their presence. He stirred a little and his lips parted. Koehler melted snow in his hand and poured the drops into Hedon's mouth.

"Move his arms and legs a little to warm him," the doctor directed. "Not too hard; we mustn't make the blood flow."

He reached within his own clothing and tore off a strip for a bandage. Hedon opened his eyes. He saw Koehler bending over him and recognised him.

"It's only a frostbite, doctor," he said clearly. "I tell you I'm all right. I can go on."

He closed his eyes again. None of the others spoke. The words were familiar to Geoff. He recalled a story Koehler had told of Hedon on

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one of the sledge expedition from the *Aurora* when Eric had frozen his feet. Hedon was speaking again.

"Who's here, Koehler?" he was saying. "Who's here?"

"We came for you, Eric," the doctor said slowly and distinctly. "We came back for you."

"I know. Thomas is dead." Hedon replied. "I buried him; he——"

"We know about that, Eric," Koehler said quietly. "We went up there and found your record—at Mason Land."

"At Mason Land!" Hedon repeated. "You went there? Who went?" he persisted.

Koehler tried to quiet him.

Hedon opened his eyes and moved so as to look past the doctor and saw Geoff and Latham, whom he did not seem to know.

"Hello, Brunton!" he hailed weakly. "I know you came up for me, doctor," he continued. "I heard that. But—you're all right?"

"We're all right." Brunton, bending over him, seized Hedon's arm, and moaned.

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"All right, Jules. My fault," Eric murmured.

His mind was completely clear now, and he seemed also gaining strength. "Doctor, who's here?" he demanded.

"Jerry and Brunton and Linn and I came back for you," the surgeon said. "Here are Price Latham and Geoffrey Sherwood, who came with us too."

Hedon repeated the names. "And—and anybody else?" he asked. His eyes had closed.

Koehler realised that in some way Hedon had word of the expedition. He was in suspense before the question which he dared not put direct.

"Margaret Sherwood came," the doctor added. "She's here too; we're all well."

Hedon's eyes opened and stared. "Say that again!"

Koehler repeated.

"She didn't come!" Hedon denied. "They —they said she was going to; but she didn't come up here with the rest of you on the ship. Koehler, tell me she didn't."

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"Oh, Koehler! She came? Where? Where's the—the ship?"

"She's not on the ship, Eric. She's with us now; she's near here."

The wounded man struggled to rise. The surgeon half helped, half hindered him.

"I'm all right, Koehler," he insisted. "That didn't hurt me." He struggled till they let him stand, then he staggered and Koehler supported him.

"Go back to camp for a sledge," the doctor directed Geoff. "You'd better say nothing to your sister till we get him nearer camp; there's no use bringing her 'way out here."

The instruction seemed to bring to Hedon better realisation of the girl's nearness. "What?" he asked; then collected himself. "Yes. Don't—don't—that is, do as he says. But wait a minute."

Geoff hesitated, standing before Hedon, who was now held up between Koehler and Brunton. His recollection of Eric had been only a boy's impression formed four years before; now he knew that he never had known

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Hedon at all. Impulsively Geoff caught Hedon's shoulder.

"I'm one that fired at you," he said. "Perhaps I hit; probably I'm the one that did. I had a good gun."

"I might have known you'd be hunting," Eric said. "I almost shot a man once. I should have been careful. The Eskimos told me you were near."

"You were coming for us?" Koehler was able to restrain the question no longer.

"Yes."

"You knew we were here?"

"Yes."

"How?" Latham asked that. The doctor checked himself.

"The *Kadiack*, you know——"

"Yes, we know her," Koehler said. "The Canadian exploration ship."

"Yes. She left Nome about the time the *Viborg* started."

"Then you know about the *Viborg?*"

"The *Kadiack* came into Coronation Bay" —Hedon motioned south—"two months ago. She's wintering there. She brought news from

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'Alaska that you'd started. They said Margaret too. I thought something must be wrong about that; but," he appealed now to Geoff, "she's really here?"

"She's here," Geoff assured. "I'm Geoff, you see. I'm her brother."

"I know you now," said Hedon. "I only wanted to be—sure. Then, if she is here, don't tell her—that is, you won't worry her about me?"

"Go for the sledge," Koehler again commanded Geoff.

Geoff started off for the sledge, hearing them still talking behind him. A hundred questions, a thousand wonders, rushed to his mind, but he put them off and hurried ahead. Wherever Hedon had come from and whatever he had gone through, he seemed to be strong and in fair shape. The wound in his head, even if not dangerous, would have more seriously disabled a weak man. As Geoff was climbing the first ice ridge toward the camp he saw figures before him. An empty sledge pulled by a man who must be Michaelis and another figure which must be Margaret were coming

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toward him. Evidently they had heard the shots and afterward had seen that something was wrong.

"Geoff," Margaret recognised and hailed him, "what is it?"

He stopped, panting, and let them come up. As they climbed the ridge they could clearly see Brunton and Koehler half carrying Hedon between them and Latham walking alongside with the guns.

"What is that? Who is that?" Margaret cried quickly. She saw that another man was there and that the trouble was not an accident to one of the hunters.

"Margaret, it's Eric!"

"Eric!"

"He was coming to meet us."

She had stopped, but now she was running ahead of the others toward the group. They did not see her coming, or at least only Latham might have. They were picking their way over very rough ice. Then Hedon looked up. As Margaret approached in her Eskimo garments he could not have known her at the distance, yet something made him certain it was she be-

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fore either of the men holding him saw her. He freed himself from their help as though they only hindered him, and with a summoning of his strength he sprang forward and toward her.

She ran to him with a cry; then, controlling herself, she called to him to stop, to wait, and she called to Koehler to catch him. Hedon laughed and tried to shake off his helpers as they seized him, then he stumbled dizzily. The surgeon had his arm round him and was supporting him when Margaret reached them.

She had pulled off her mittens as she ran; and now, as she saw how Eric had been hurt, she put her bare fingers to his face and touched him softly. In his dizziness he clung to Koehler, his eyes closed; and for an instant after he recovered from his faint he seemed not to dare to open his eyes, as though if he did either she must vanish or he could not bear more emotion at that moment. So he clung to Koehler as he felt her fingers satisfy themselves as to his hurt and heard her quick breathing.

"Margaret!" he murmured. "It's really you? Speak to me again. Let me hear your

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voice. All the time she had been examining his hurt she had been repeating his name ceaselessly: "Eric! Eric! Eric!" till it ran into a murmur.

"It's I—Margaret!" now she cried to him. "Eric, open your eyes; look at me!"

He obeyed, and for the first second of his sight of her face he seemed strong again, but again he reeled and was weak as he tried to stand without support. She helped to hold him while Michaelis brought up the sledge. They set him on it and supported him there.

"Margaret, why did you come?" he repeated to her again and again, as Brunton and Koehler and Geoff put themselves into the harness with Michaelis and as they slowly and carefully drew him on toward their camp. Margaret marched on one side, supporting him; on the other side Latham walked. "They told me—I mean the ship that came from Alaska—that you started on the *Viborg*. But I couldn't believe it, Margaret. I couldn't believe it even a minute ago when they said you were here."

"Every one else said you were dead, Eric," she explained; and once having said his name

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to him she must speak it over and over again—"Eric, Eric, Eric. But I knew you must be alive. I believe if every one else failed I must find you. So I came."

"And I knew you had come when they told me," he confessed; "really I knew it was so. For I knew—you!"

So they brought him to their shelters. As they took him in and as he met McNeal and Linn, for the first time he sensed that disaster had happened.

"Why, Jerry, what's happened? Old fellow, you've—why, you—what's happened?" he appealed. "Why, you're all here!" he realised; "Linn, you and McNeal." He named over the others. "Koehler, where's the ship? Whom have you left on the ship?"

The doctor, unable to put off the news longer, met him. "There's no one on the ship, Eric."

"You mean——"

Koehler still hesitated; then Margaret, as though that were nothing now that she had found Eric told him.

"The ship's burned."

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"Burned?"

"Yes, north of here—two months ago."

"What?"

Now that she had started she saw no way except to tell him all.

"It burned with almost all our supplies."

"I see." Hedon looked at McNeal, then about the circle of men, and then round the little shelter. "Where were you going?" he asked.

"South to find the Eskimos."

He winced.

"What is it?" Margaret cried with concern.

"The Eskimos are south of here—just a little. You've almost got to them. It was one of them told me you were here. But"—now he hesitated, and looked from the girl to the others, and then told them—"I was trying to get to you to turn you back to your ship as soon as I could. For the Eskimos themselves are starving. The hunt was bad this fall and they're getting almost nothing this winter. They've not got food enough for themselves. There's no living on this part of the country this year."

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CHAPTER XVIII

"YOU FOUND HIS CAIRN"

THE news that Hedon brought struck the party with a shock. Margaret alone was unaffected by it; indeed, it was doubtful if she heard it at all. Geoff would have said that his thought also had been entirely occupied with Eric and the fact that he had been found. But now he realised that concurrently he had been thinking of more than that. His thoughts had been running thus:

Eric must have been living on the country for at least a year. He spoke of the Eskimos and mentioned that they had seen the party; therefore the Eskimos could not be far away and must have food and fuel.

So the finding of Hedon seemed to mean at least the putting off of starvation. But his news, as he gave it in greater detail, was most serious. In the fall and winter of the year previous, when Eric alone came down the coast,

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there had been more than the usual amount of game of all kinds. But this year, as the *Viborg* party already had reason to know, was one of those seasons in the North when, for reasons unexplained, animals seemed to desert great districts.

Hedon's story of his own adventures was simple and direct. As he had written in his record at Mason Land, he had left the hut in the spring of the year before, expecting to travel directly south over the ice before it broke up. Crossing the island, he shot a bear, and before leaving land built a cairn at the south-west cape and left there a report which, if found, would save any relief expedition from crossing to the cabin. He then had six dogs in good condition and one sledge. The ice broke up early, but by careful travel he managed to work his way down to the large Prince of Wales Land before the sea was entirely open. There he found plenty of game through the course of summer, and with the autumn freeze-up he crossed the channel to Victoria Island.

As caribou were plenty that fall he had an abundance of meat for himself and his dogs till

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he got down to where the Eskimos were, and he lived with them till the spring on deer meat and seals which they caught. Then he travelled to the south shore of Victoria Land and found a whaler, the *Nares,* which had been wintering there. He was aboard this vessel on his way south by way of Alaska and the Bering Sea when it met the *Kadiack* at the end of the summer. The *Kadiack* had come directly from Nome and brought reports of the *Viborg's* starting up to Mason Land by the original route of the *Aurora.* Hedon immediately changed from the *Nares* to the *Kadiack* and returned with it into Coronation Gulf, where it was to winter. Taking supplies from the ship on his sledge, and accompanied by one Eskimo, Eric returned more than four hundred miles on his trail as rapidly as he could to meet any relief party that might have found his cairns and be following his route.

On this trip he lived on the country after his supplies from the *Kadiack* gave out. For a while he found caribou; then game of all kinds became very scarce. The Eskimos he met were in want and having a very hard time. He gained a village about thirty miles below the

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camp of the *Viborg* people, where an Eskimo hunter told him of seeing a party which he had supposed to be the strange white *kabluna* travelling south over the ice and later going into camp after the storm. The Eskimo had been afraid to approach and had hidden. Hedon took this man and started with him and a sledge; but as they approached the camp of the *kabluna* the Eskimo lost courage and deserted, so Eric came on alone.

Many details were not then told; but what was related made plain that at least one of the cairns Eric built on his journey south had been erected upon a shore visited by the *Viborg* after leaving Mason Land. Geoff could not be sure, from Hedon's description of the place, whether the cairn which had been missed by the searchers sent on shore had stood in one of the spots explored only by Latham. But Geoff learned that it was Eric who had visited and had photographed the stone house near the spot where the *Viborg* burned. Further, Eric had built the *Aurora* cairns where Geoff had discovered the stones strewed in front of the lonely little hut. The message left there told

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simply that he had reached that spot safely and was traveling on south well supplied.

There was no longer doubt in Geoff's mind, after he learned this, that Latham had found both cairns and destroyed them. But Koehler was watching Geoff as he questioned Eric; and the doctor checked the boy as he saw Geoff's hot impulse to turn upon Latham with his charge. Koehler drew him away from the others gathered in the little shelter.

"He knew Eric had crossed the sea from Mason Land safely when he tried to make us all go home!" Geoff cried.

"We don't know that. We can't prove it," Koehler cautioned.

"Who but he could have knocked down the cairns before that stone house?"

"Animals—bears sometimes destroy cairns."

"You know they didn't destroy those!"

Koehler made no direct denial. The men of the party, except Latham, were coming out of the shelter, where they all had gathered to hear Hedon's story, and entering the second hut. Latham and Margaret were left with Eric Hedon, and after a few moments Latham also

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came to the other shelter. As he appeared Koehler signalled to Geoff to make no charges before the others.

"Come outside with me a moment!" Geoff therefore invited Latham.

The man, looking at him suspiciously, complied. The two walked out in the bitter cold alone. The moon was just setting, but the last green rays showed to each man his companion's face.

"What do you want?" Latham demanded.

"Price, how did you come to miss Eric's cairns?"

"What are you getting at?"

"You know what I'm getting at!"

"Tell me!"

"I will!" Geoff defied. "I'll tell you I believe you found—or at least could have found if you'd decently searched—one of his cairns on those first islands below Mason Land."

"You confounded——" Latham began.

"Shut up! I told you that because I'm sure of it. Either you found his cairn there or you didn't look where you said you did. But pass that; I can't prove it; I just know it. I know

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you found and knocked over and said nothing about his cairns before that stone house where we found his camera spool."

Latham waited menacingly for him to go on.

"Koehler and I found the stones of the cairns under the snow. We thought then they were *Aurora* cairns, but we weren't sure of it, so we said nothing. But now we know Hedon built cairns there; and that you found them and threw them down and then came back and denied you'd seen the place when we told about the house."

"That's exactly true!" Latham caught Geoff off guard with the sudden admission.

"Then you did it?"

"I found those last cairns, and I would have told you so myself in a moment," Latham returned.

"Oh, you would?"

"Anywhere else and under any other conditions I'd knock you down for what you've said," Latham faced him. "Call Koehler out here and any one else you've told that to."

Geoff hesitated, then obeyed. The three stood together on the ice.

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"Koehler!" Latham addressed the older man and now disregarded Geoff. "He's been telling me you found the cairns by that stone house knocked down. I want to tell you now I found those cairns and got the message saying that Hedon had passed that point almost a year before. I took it out and knocked down the cairns."

"Well," questioned the doctor quietly. "Why?"

"Because I felt that in our condition at that time nothing should influence our movements but our own interests. I could not trust the rest of you not to be fools and try to follow up a man who'd been by twelve months before. I acted in the interests of all."

"I see," said Koehler quietly.

Latham turned away and went back into the shelter with the other men.

In the farther little snow hut Margaret Sherwood and Eric were left alone. He lay on the sleeping shelf of snow where Koehler had commanded him to remain after his wound had been dressed and where he had told his story. Beside him Margaret sat. Now that

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they were alone he tried to rise, but she, instead of coming closer to him, drew away. He sank back a little and gazed at her with a question.

"My dear!" he cried to her softly. "My dear! Why, what is the matter? What has been the matter, dear?"

"Don't say that!" she forbade him, and shut her eyes as he stared at her.

"What? Don't say that anything is the matter, Margaret?"

"No; don't say—don't call me as you used to!"

"I don't understand! I have seen that something is strange, of course, Margaret; but —tell me, what is it?"

"Help me to tell you, Eric!" she appealed.

"Why, Margaret! Help you—now?"

"Oh, surely you saw!" she motioned dumbly.

"Latham, you mean?" he questioned. "Yes, I saw he stayed here after the others. He—there were other things in the way he spoke to you, looked at you, looked at me. I see, Margaret; then I did not just imagine them?"

"Imagine them—no!"

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"What do you mean?"

"How can I tell you, Eric?"

"They mean"—he and she both had forgotten what the surgeon had warned them; he drew himsef up now straight and faced her in his direct demand, the blood running hot to flush his face and a ruddy spot welling through the cloths of his bandage—"they mean he has some claim on you?"

Then she told him, beginning with the report of McNeal and Koehler and the others who came back from the *Aurora* that he must be dead.

"Yes!" he nodded to her. "I knew that, of course. At Mason Land I realised that they would tell you that I was dead. That's why I went over the ice in June—after poor Thomas was dead—and didn't wait till the freeze again. Margaret, I had to try to get to you."

"And every one was sure you were dead—every one, every one, Eric," she went on. "They all said I must forget you; I must give you up; I must marry him. My father and mother had wanted me to marry him, you know, and so did every one else. They said

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even if you came back I should put you away, but that surely you were dead. But I wouldn't believe it."

"Go on, Margaret!" he cried.

"Then came the message of the wild goose!"

"What?"

She told him of that.

"What a strange thing!" He stared at her for a moment. "And how nearly true that was!"

"It was true; that was it, Eric! Oh, my love —forgive me, but I had to say it that once— that message made me almost mad. I knew it mightn't be real—that is, I knew it might not have been sent by you; but everything in my soul told me that what it said was true. You were safe. You needed help. And I had to send it to you!"

"My poor sweet heart!"

"Eric, you must see how it was with me. I sent at once for my cousin—Mrs. Chandler, you remember her. She told me I was a fool and scolded me. I could get no money from her. I knew I should be laughed at in the same way by other people, and I had no time to seek

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other people. I had to do what I was to do at once, you see that, else I could have no chance of sending a ship for you that year."

"Of course I see, Margaret!"

"Then Price and Geoff came. They were against me, both of them, as I knew they'd be; but I was desperate. Eric, you see I thought of you starving, dying—perhaps dying a day before I could get a ship to you, because I delayed. I wasn't afraid to risk myself to save you."

She choked and halted again. "I must know it all now, Margaret!" he commanded her.

"Then Price made his offer to me. I didn't have the money; I couldn't get it. But he would give it to me that day, that moment, if I would give you up in case we sent a ship and couldn't find you. So we made the bargain."

"The bargain?"

"Yes. We arranged that he would give me a ship to send to you at once. I could have it and go in it myself to Mason Land; only, if I failed to find you there, I was to give you up and—and——"

She faltered.

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"Marry him?"

"Marry him."

"But," Eric cried, "there you found——"

"That you had been there and gone and were to build cairns if you got to the islands south. We searched them week after week, but you hadn't got there. I couldn't show that you'd got there. He said that your own message proved you must be lost and he ordered the ship south. He said there was no use in our looking for you longer; that he'd filled his part of the bargain. So he claimed me."

"Claimed you?" Eric let her go and his eyes glowed.

"The men turned on him and refused to go back. Then he said I'd tricked him; that I meant to cheat him all along; that I used the men to force him to stay beyond his bargain. Eric, it was true; from his point of view it was true. I didn't care about anything else but finding you; I was afraid he might make the men go back. So I told him he'd done his part and I'd do mine; but he must stay and search longer, no matter how hopeless it was. Then he did."

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"And you—you?"

"He has my word that he can claim me when we get home."

For another moment in silence Hedon stared at her, then shut his eyes and swayed in a faint. She caught him as he was about to fall and laid him down gently on the sleeping shelf.

"Margaret," he murmured to her, "I know how you offered it."

"It was because I couldn't think of anything beyond finding you that I did it," she cried to him. "And now—Doctor!" she called. Doctor!"

Koehler came in. He took Hedon from her and after a moment sent her away. Though outwardly she was controlled, inwardly she was beside herself when Geoff came to her and told her of the cairns.

"What?" she cried. "How do you know Price had found one of Eric's cairns before he tried to turn the ship back?"

Geoff told her how they had found the cairns by the stone house thrown down, and that Latham had admitted doing it.

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"But that can't help me," she cried; "that was too late. Nothing he did then could change my word of honour given him. But before I gave my word on the ship, Geoff, can we know he had seen a cairn of Eric's then?"

Geoff had no answer for that. No one could answer that question but Latham; and already he had given his answer. He had seen no cairn and had known no more than any of the others when he had required and taken Margaret's word, which now bound her to him though Eric Hedon was found.

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CHAPTER XIX

SUCCOUR FROM THE STONE AGE

REALISATION of her position came to Margaret then; but the immediate emergencies of the party at least prevented her dwelling upon it. Though Eric had brought word that the Eskimos farther down the coast were in want, their condition was not so desperate as that of the whites. The eight from the *Viborg* had fuel for barely another day and full rations for less than a week. Seals were the only animals that might be got at that time of the year, and they furnished both food and oil. But the Eskimos had told Eric that the shore upon which *kabluna* had encamped was absolutely devoid of seals, and this had been shown to be true. The Eskimos had built their snow village on the ice of the best bay for seals, which was some thirty miles to the south.

Preparations were made at once, therefore, to push on to that bay; and immediately after

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moonrise twelve hours later the party started south. McNeal insisted on walking for a while, though the sledges now were very light. Eric had regained enough strength to hold the slow pace of the sledges.

He had lain in the larger of the two shelters, where Latham also slept. Margaret had not seen him alone again, and now on the march there was no time to talk, but she did not need to have him tell her how he felt. She had told him that she considered herself bound in honour to Latham; and he would do nothing and would take no attitude toward her which demanded breaking her bond. But he avoided Latham, as Latham too avoided him. She could see that Eric at times tried to conceal before the others his repulsion for Latham; but he did not succeed.

It was another moon day of great cold, but there was no wind. The march took the trail of Eric's tracks the day before, and the party came upon the marks of the Eskimo who had turned back with the sledge. They camped where Eric and the Eskimo had slept the second night before and moved on with the next

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rising of the moon. The trail took them out now over the sea and round a point beyond which lay a long bay. On account of the protection of the high shores on three sides, the water seemed to have frozen more smoothly there than elsewhere. Little rough ice appeared and few ridges, and all was covered deep with snow. As the nine white people turned into this bay, far ahead over the smooth snow showed a score or more of tiny snow roofs, and scattered away from these in every direction were dark spots—the Eskimo seal hunters watching for seal to spear for food for their hungry people.

The nearest of these figures sat, each upon a block of ice or snow; each held a spear in hand and bent with eyes fixed upon the ice in front of him where he was watching a hole to which a seal might rise to breathe. Apparently the Eskimo who had accompanied Eric almost to the camp of the *kabluna* had warned the hunters of the possible approach of strangers or at all times even in that remote and lonely desolation the Eskimos kept a sharp lookout; for as Eric led into the bay, alarm ran from man to

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man scattered over the ice till some thirty figures swiftly gathered, men armed with spear and bow and long knife, and standing, watching, silent and wary, the advance of the strangers.

"In this bay are just so many seals—enough, the Eskimos hope, to give them food to scrape through the winter," Eric said quietly as his party halted. "They don't know where other seals may be got; and they look upon those here as their own, as we would a herd of cattle. I'll go forward to meet the hunters; they know me. Some one else ought to go with me as a sample of the rest of us."

"Unarmed?" objected Latham, as he watched Hedon put down his rifle.

"Koehler or Brunton or you, Geoff, you'll go?" Eric disregarded Price.

The surgeon had already stepped forward; so he and Eric advanced slowly, their empty hands held out away from their bodies. Three Eskimos, in similar posture, advanced to meet them. Would the savages, themselves starving, take in nine strangers to share with them what they had? If they would not—but the

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parley seemed progressing favourably. The Eskimos, assured that neither of the strangers had knives concealed, approached and talked. Hedon stayed with them while Koehler came back.

"They aren't taking enough seals each day to feed themselves; they're living now on the last of the caribou meat they got in the fall," the doctor reported. "But they'll share with us while it lasts."

Hedon now motioned his party forward, and at the same moment the main body of hunters moved to meet them. Flanked on both sides by gaunt, swarthy savages bearing seal spears and long knives, the nine white strangers entered the Eskimo village.

Though Geoff knew that Eric recently had visited these people and found them not only friendly but hospitable, and though Koehler now had reported their offer to welcome the whites and give what aid they could, Geoff watched the Eskimos wonderingly as he halted with his companions in the snow village. The little, rounded dwellings, some score in number, stood in a rough crescent; before them the

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women and children of the hunters were grouped—silent, staring but smiling as the strangers approached and were proclaimed by the escort as visitors of good intentions about to become guests. Half famished and dying dogs skulked about and bristled at the smell of the visitors and their foreign dog teams. This was one of the tribes that had never seen *kabluna* till Eric Hedon came on them; but they had heard of the whites from other tribes.

Kabluna, in the reports of these people, were strange men with ways of their own. Sometimes they appeared in possession of monstrous wealth and in large ships well supplied, and then they gave to the Eskimos only in barter—a needle for a fox skin, another for a seal. But at other times the *kabluna,* starving and with empty seldges, sought out the Eskimos for fuel and skins. This was one of those times now; so, as other tribes had done before, the Palugmiut offered the hospitality of the village. Some of the hunters, putting down their seal spears, at once sent for their snow-knives; others who had armed themselves with bows and arrows at the first sight of the

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strange party now came from their igloos wearing building mittens. An old man, who seemed to possess authority or at least to be entrusted by the others with the direction of the housing of the strangers, discussed with Eric and Koehler where the dwellings for the *kabluna* should be erected. Meanwhile other Eskimos who had been in the escort to the village spoke to their women; these advanced now, smiling and curious, to closer, friendly inspection of the strangers and then retreated to their houses where cooking was commenced.

The Eskimo who had been talking with Eric and Koehler chose a spot at one end of the crescent of the village where the builders began cutting blocks for the new igloos. Eric returned to the others of his party.

"They will not let us help with the building," he said. "They will put up two houses for us; and they have invited us to go to the houses where meat is now cooking for dinner. They have been apologising for having little fresh meat; they have been depending recently upon the last of the frozen caribou meat saved after the fall hunting; but some of them have caught

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seals this morning." He turned to Margaret. "After our houses are finished, we will probably prepare our own food as we've been doing. Shall I make some excuse for you so you won't have to eat now?"

She shook her head simply and, as one of the Eskimos motioned, she moved off with Geoff. Latham followed her. The others went with different hosts.

Always themselves accompanied by their women in their travels and having no knowledge of any other people, the Eskimos showed no greater surprise or curiosity over the presence of Margaret than over the appearance of the men; indeed their expectation, as well as Geoff could make it out, seemed to be that so large a party of strangers would prove to include several women. Geoff went on hands and knees into the snow hut after his host; Margaret followed; Latham came afterwards. As Geoff entered and stood up, crouched a little—the snow-block dome was not quite high enough to permit him to stand erect—he gasped in spite of himself.

The snow house was snug and warm within

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—much warmer than the rudey improvised shelter which for the last weeks had served to protect the *Viborg's* people. Well built of evenly cut and closely fitted blocks, the inner walls had become lined with a layer of ice as the heat from the stone lamp, suspended from the dome, had started to melt the snow. Above the burning lamp, a pot was held by a thong; the pot was boiling; it was full of seal meat. But even the hot odour of this fresh meat cooking could not remove from Geoff his first shock as he entered the igloo.

Although he had known, since hearing Eric's account, that the Eskimos themselves were in want and although he had himself seen the condition of Eskimos in Greenland, still the recent struggle to reach some Eskimo village —the constant counting upon the gaining of such a village as a sanctuary promising at least temporary security—had made him picture an Eskimo house as a more definite improvement upon the rudimental shelters which he had shared during the retreat from the *Viborg*. But except for the tight, well built walls of snow which made this igloo really warm and

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except for the fresh meat boiling over the lamp, this Eskimo home could offer nothing. It was slightly oval—six or seven feet in one diameter and eight or nine in the other—and had on one side a low bank or shelf a couple of feet high and covered with caribou and musk-ox skins. This, the sleeping-shelf, was the only arrangement which might be called furniture unless one so considered the spears and spare bows stored overhead, the racks from which drying clothing hung and the pots and stone and beaten copper utensils for cutting up and cooking meat.

But, if the Eskimos possessed less than Geoff had expected, they offered to share what they had in no smaller spirit than that related of them. The woman who watched the pot boiling over the lamp smiled at each of her guests as they entered and, after nodding and staring about, seated themselves on the edge of the sleeping shelf. Two children who seemed to belong in the house crept in; and the hostess, removing the pot from the flame, passed portions of the meat about. The food was fresh, well cooked and generously given. So that

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dinner was supplied to the *kabluna* as guests of the Palugmiut; afterwards, as long as the strangers remained, they would have the right to share in each day's catch as members of the Eskimo community.

Koehler explained this when the new igloos were finished and the party of nine gathered in the larger one. A native stone lamp with animal oil burning in it hung from the roof, replacing the more wasteful oil stoves saved from the ship; the snow house was warm and tight.

"The Eskimos will include us, for a time at least, in their daily distribution of food. Every one who catches a seal will send some meat to us, as they do to others in the village who make no catch. When the fresh meat is insufficient, they will distribute to us, as to themselves, some of the stored caribou meat. Of course we are expected at once to try to provide for ourselves. And of course if we happen to have luck we must share with them; but we'll probably not get anything like our portion at first. We may learn. Shall we start now our watches at the seal holes?"

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So on that day upon which they reached the Palugmiut upon the bay of seals, Geoff with Eric and Latham and Koeher and the other men from the *Viborg* joined in the watch for seal. At that season the seal, of course, were living under the sea ice. As this ice had frozen over the bay the seals had gnawed holes in it for air, and as the freezing continued had kept these holes open by gnawing. These holes were now hidden under the snow, and the Eskimo dogs were used to smell them out. Beside each hole thus located a hunter stationed himself, sitting silent on a block of snow, spear in hand, ready to stab instantly when an animal rose. If the blow missed, the seal disappeared; if it struck home, the hunter had to hold the killed seal with his spear, while with ice-axe or knife he chipped the breathing hole large enough to pull the seal through.

Day after day, in the manner of the Eskimos, the eight white men sat, each on his block of snow, seal spear poised. Seal hunting offered their only hope of obtaining food, their only way of keeping alive. The feeling of incredulity that such a desperate necessity could

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be real now no longer came to Geoff, and he sould see also that no longer it came to Price Latham. Instead of this seeming some strange, impossible, outlandish dream of slow starvation, which one could banish merely by shaking oneself awake, now it was established as the only actual condition of existence.

As Geoff thought of his life at the club and at home, that life sometimes seemed not six months but six thousand years away, and not in the past but somehow far in the future. Among men of the stone age—living or dying according as to whether they were able to stab a spear through the brain of a seal as the animal rose for breath and before he dived again—Geoff and the rest had become as men of that age, with civilisation thousands of years ahead. They were not just a few weeks' journey north of the cities of America and Europe. They were living in Britain and France in the ice age when the glaciers crept down and filled the valleys, driving before them the men of the ice and snow—the Cave Men of a time so long ago that it was called by the name of a geological era. The bones of the musk-sheep

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lie in a trail across Europe following the prehistoric camps of the Cave Men, and the skins of the musk-ox now helped to furnish the sleeping shelf of snow on which Geoff lay. The stone arrowheads, the sewing-needles, the amulets and necklaces of carved teeth and the horn daggers, shown in museums as relics of the Cave Men of milleniums ago, were merely the ornaments and weapons of the families in the igloos there on the bay ice; the rude sketches of bears and foxes found on the old paleolithic tusks seemed simply the sketches of these Eskimos scratched on their walrus ivory.

The moon waned and was gone; and in the endless darkness of the arctic night, with only the aurora to light the sky, the hunters shivered and froze their faces, hands and feet as they sat at their seal holes. Each hunter, Eskimo or white, stayed out in the terrible cold as long as he dared; but all together brought back not enough meat to feed the village; and the few seals that were procured were nearly all caught by the Eskimos. The dogs, except a few spared to find out fresh seal holes, now were let die unfed; the people stared at each other

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from sunken eyes and their children cried with hunger. Yet the Eskimos shared alike with each other and with their white visitors.

The moon came back; but though the Eskimos moved their village once and then again to try different parts of the bay, the seal hunters found little success. The cold more quickly numbed men not half fed. The white hunters stubbornly stayed out through the moonlit period; then they retreated into their igloos, which the Eskimos' seal oil kept warm.

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CHAPTER XX

CAN I STARVE LIKE A SAVAGE

FIVE of the men were gathered in one of the snow huts after an absolutely bootless day.

"We've got to get out of here," Latham said desperately.

"Where to?" McNeal questioned practically.

"We can't get through the winter here."

"Then we can't do it anywhere else. This is the Eskimos' country. They know it. If we can't get along with them giving us food, we'll be worse off by ourselves with no one to help us."

Eric Hedon looked about; he had been warming his fingers, which were frostbidden badly.

"It doesn't seem to me a problem as to whether we ought to get out," he suggested quietly. "I should say it was rather the Eski-

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mos' problem as to whether they ought to put us out."

"They would if they were even half civilised," Geoff said grimly.

"Found that out?" Eric looked at him.

"Some one's got to make a try for the ship —the *Kadiack,*" Latham persisted.

"What for?" asked Hedon.

"For help, of course."

"For himself?" Eric returned.

"What do you mean?"

"The *Kadiack's* over four hundred miles from here," Hedon replied patiently. The discussion was old. "Before any one gets there and back we'll need no help or be beyond it."

"Besides," said Koehler, "how many days' supplies for eight people would a sledge party coming from the *Kadiack* four hundred miles away have left when it got here? And what would you live on while you're getting to the *Kadiack?* That's the first thing."

"To-day some of the Eskimos had luck," Latham replied. "There'll be more than a sledge supply of meat and oil left to-night."

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Eric turned upon him directly. "Exactly what do you mean by that?"

"That the thing to do is for some one to take that food and fuel and make a try for the *Kadiack*," Latham replied.

"Take it?" repeated Hedon. "How?"

"Take it," iterated Latham indefinitely.

"When you ask the Eskimos to give you that food and fuel, the first that they've had ahead for weeks, what's the inducement you're going to offer them? Assuming they give you enough to see a man through to the ship, does he bring back from the *Kadiack* relief for all the Eskimos too? Or when we get our own food from the ship is it the idea to say: 'Thanks, savages, we've finished your food. Here's some of our own for us. Good-bye'?"

"Of course we can't bring enough for them," Latham answered angrily.

"Then how do you get their meat to take you to the ship?"

"Any way!" Latham defied.

You mean?"

"We'll starve here!"

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"Then," Koehler cut in, "let's try to starve like gentlemen."

Hedon shook his head and smiled. "You know better than that, doc," he said. "Let's try to starve like savages."

"Like savages?" Geoff repeated.

Hedon looked away. "If you've read the unexpurgated accounts of our own people starving in the North you'll know what I mean, Geoff. If we come to it—and I don't say we will, for we'll stand a lot of starving yet before we'll be finished—but if we do come to it, let's try to do it decently and as part of the day's work, like Eskimos."

Some one without the igloo shouted and entered, and the daughter of a Palugmiut hunter stood before them, bearing portions of a freshly killed seal.

"Here's our hand-out," said Geoff, as Linn took the meat and put it into the pot suspended by a cord over the oil lamp.

Geoff went into the small igloo close by, which had been built for him and his sister. He roused her, and after they returned to the large snow house the nine guests of the Eskimos

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dined, not with uniform delicacy, on the donated meat. The messenger who had brought the meal went out; and soon two seal hunters, old men, entered.

They squatted before their guests, one silently shaping a new wooden shaft for his spear, the other speaking with Hedon and Koehler, who understood his tongue.

"What have they come for?" Latham asked nervously.

"Don't worry," Koehler returned; "they haven't come with an eviction or to cut off our credit at the butcher's."

Eric spoke to Margaret, indicating the hunter working on his spear. "I asked him to come and show us the next time he was shaping a handle."

"Why?" She observed the man with closer interest.

"Look at his blue eyes. No Eskimo of pure blood ever has light eyes. See, his hair is not black, as usual. There's been no contact of this tribe with the whites in any historic time."

"Then how does he have light eyes?"

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"We can only guess; but perhaps the spear handle will tell us."

The Eskimo, pleased with the white man's interest in his work, looked up and then continued his cutting.

"You see, Otto," said Hedon, continuing with Koehler a discussion they had begun before, "counting this man, there are at least three people in this tribe with eyes and hair lighter than any true Eskimo can have. Stefansson met and described a number of such types in tribes to the south of here. He was positive that the blond Eskimo he met had not come in contact with recent explorers; and if we didn't know that these people had no memory of meeting white men, the age of these three light-eyed people would tell that they got their European characteristics far back. One of them is this man's mother."

"European characteristics?" Geoff repeated.

"Watch him," Eric warned quietly.

The Eskimo, having finished the shaping of his spear handle, turned it under his stone knife, and carefully, slowly and with precision carved upon it a few strange lines. When he

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had finished it he nodded and extended the spear handle to Hedon. Eric studied the marks and with a smile handed the wood to Koehler.

"What are you two looking at?" Margaret cried.

"What do you make of them, doctor?" Eric appealed.

"Runes!" Koehler announced.

"Runes?" Geoff asked.

"Runic writing—the kind of characters carved by the Norsemen at the time they were in Greenland!" Hedon cried. He took back the spear handle and, turning to the Eskimo who had carved the characters, he began asking him some questions.

"The writing of the Norsemen in Greenland?" Geoff stared from Hedon to the Eskimo.

"What are you asking him?" Margaret said to Eric.

"I was trying to find out if he knew what the marks mean. He says he doesn't. He didn't even understand that the marks should have any meaning."

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"Then why did he make them, did he say?"

"He was taught to; that's all he knows. In his tribe long ago—he's one of the survivors of a tribe that was almost wiped out by starvation; and he came to the Palugmiuts when he was a boy—he had been taught to scratch his spears that way."

"Then what do you think the marks mean?"

Eric looked at Koehler, who took the handle again and studied it. "They aren't real runes, of course," Koehler said conservatively. "They're only marks that suggest runes—as you'd expect runes to be made if they'd been taught from one generation to another after their meaning was forgotten. But when I first saw the marks they made me think of runes I'd seen on stones in Greenland spelling the name of Sigur."

"Sigur?"

"That was a powerful family in the old Norse colony there, one of the families that disappeared."

The man who had made the marks on the spear gazed about the circle, and seeing that his work had interested them so much he put

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forth his hand to receive his spear back. When it was returned to him he looked down at his carving and studied it patiently, and then, more puzzled, gazed up at the strange white people and smiled. His Eskimo companion rose to go and the spear-maker followed. For a moment, before crouching to go out through the low snow tunnel of the igloo, the man straightened and stood before his comrade, who was a dark-eyed, black-haired man of the short Eskimo type. The blue-eyed man was not much taller; but for the instant he seemed to tower over the dark-eyed native, and his figure was straighter. Suddenly there seemed a sternness, almost a majesty, in the spear-maker's bearing entirely absent from that of his companion. He looked once more about the company staring at him, and as he met their gaze a gleam of fire flashed from his eyes, his lips tightened and straightened. Then he stooped and on all fours crawled after his companion out of the snow hut.

The whites, left alone, looked at one another. Had they seen there before them a son of the

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old vikings of Greenland? If that was so, what a story was told in those scratches on the handle of the spear! First, as the wrecking of the ships cut off communication with Europe, the intermarrying and mixing of the Norsemen with the Eskimos; then, for reasons which no one yet could know, the travelling of white men with the Eskimos away from the shores of Greenland. The lonely stone houses scattered through the Arctic next took up the story. The Norsemen had mingled with the Eskimos and moved to other lands with them, but here and there a family still tried to keep up the traditions of their race and built a house of stone, which had stood through the centuries after the snow igloos of the Eskimos, which had been built beside it, had melted with the first summer's sun. Then, though the houses of stone still stood, no one lived in them any longer. The sons of the men who had built them lived in the igloos of Eskimos and stared at the stone walls and, calling them the work of spirits, feared to enter. But some viking's determination to keep known his name still persisted. He had carved it on his spear, and when his son

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shaped a spear he copied the carving. Then his son in turn did the same, and so on and on down the generations the custom held, and the men still bore their name upon their spears centuries after the name itself was forgotten and with it all tradition of the past of the people.

At least, that was the way in which Eric Hedon that night spelled the story of the spear. Whether it might be true, or only half true or not true at all, for an hour it furnished warm but friendly discussion and took minds away from the fears of famine. Then those thoughts returned.

Geoff, in the igloo with his sister, lay awake again for long hours. Eric undoubtedly was right; there was nothing they could do to relieve their situation. If all the food in camp were given them it would not be more than enough to enable one man to reach the *Kadiack* far off at the other end of the land. And over that distance no relief party could bring in sledges from the ship more food than would be needed to supply the sledge drivers themselves. The party must pass the winter where

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they were, trusting to their guns and the spears of the Eskimos to supply them.

Geoff wondered whether he could, as Eric put it, starve like a savage. Though for many weeks now he had recognised that starvation might be close ahead, still he could not realise it as a way for him to die.

In the Eskimo life, death by starvation was an any-day possibility, constantly and calmly considered. And when such death was inevitable it was met by these savage men with resignation. Geoff knew it was true, as Eric had said, that in parties of civilised men, starving in the Arctic, unspeakable horrors were done. As he lay in the dark he thought of Rae's report of the finding of the final camp of the last of Franklin's men who starved; of the subjects silenced in the public reports of some of the great expeditions; of the record left by another captain of the discovering of a plan among his men to kill their Eskimo hunters when they brought in no more food, in order that the remaining provisions need not be shared with those who had provided them. As he read the account at home such things had

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seemed to Geoff impossible for civilised beings to conceive. Doubtless even a few days before they were planned or done those deeds had seemed as impossible to the men who planned or carried them out.

Now he knew that there was nothing in a man's experience in civilisation to make any one certain what another might or might not do in the last savage struggles for self-preservation in starvation. Before the end would that party of whites determine to die decently? or must some one break under the test of the savage?

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CHAPTER XXI

LATHAM'S ANSWER

JUST nine days later that question was answered. The meat of the seals killed by the Eskimos on their lucky day had been eaten; and for a week almost no food was to be had. Then came another day of fortune for the Eskimo spearmen at the seal holes, and for another twenty-four hours there was to be food and to spare.

The extra meat was stored away, and after a full gorge the Eskimo hunters slept soundly. The next morning, when they awoke, their meat—or most of it—was gone; and as the alarm spread round the village it was found that two men were missing to explain the absence of the meat. One was an Eskimo—the man who carved the runes on the handles of his spears—the other man missing was Latham. With them had gone a sledge and four of the dogs that had been kept in fair condition.

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Their trail over new snow which had fallen told plainly the tale of their departure. The man who toed out as he trod had gone first with the dogs and the loaded sledge; after him—how far behind him could not be told, but after him—followed the footsteps of an Eskimo.

Eric Hedon and Geoff, with two of the Palugmiuts, took the trail and followed it as fast as they could. Now it became plainer, by the proof that the Eskimo had been running and the other man had not, that the two men had not set out together; now it was plainly a case of pursuit, with the first man knowing that he was followed and trying to urge on his team. But the dogs, ill-fed, were tiring. Half a mile farther and part of the load of the sledge was discovered—seal meat and a bag of oil lay on the snow. There was nothing to show whether these had been thrown off to lighten the sledge in the race or whether they had fallen by accident; but the sledge seemed to have travelled faster from then on and the pursuing Eskimo apparently ceased to gain. It was another mile and more before anything else showed on the snow; and then it was not

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the carcass of another seal but the form of a man.

The Eskimos saw first from far off that this man had been of their people; it was the pursuer who lay dead on the snow with the stain of his blood about him. He had been shot through the head from close by; and before he died there had been a struggle. His body was frozen, for he had lain there some hours; but before falling he used his spear—the seal spear with the handle which he had carved before the whites in the hut. Only the shaft of the spear was in his hand; the head had been broken off.

The two Eskimos, straightening after examining the body of their tribesman, muttered to each other and looked toward the white men. Hedon spoke to them quietly and pointed to the snow beyond.

Geoff, following the direction, saw spots of blood on the snow. These accompanied the track of the sledge and the dogs and the man who went on; the two white men and the Eskimos followed them. Now the blood-spotted trail showed footprints of a man weakening and staggering; they climbed a little ridge and

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then stopped. The track of the sledge and of the dogs continued; but instead of the man's footprints now was the blur where a body had fallen. At the bottom of the ridge Latham lay.

Here the white men, ahead of the Eskimos, bent down and turned over the body—for Latham lay dead. The Eskimos came up beside the others and saw for themselves that their tribesman had avenged his own death; in the last struggle he had struck with his spear.

Geoff, gasping as he gazed up from the face of the friend who had been his hero, met Hedon's eyes. Eric could have had no associations with this man which, even at such a moment, could make for mercy; but as Geoff looked at him Eric answered the unspoken question.

"He was going in the direction of the *Kadiack,*" Hedon said quietly. "He was going for help for us. We know that was what he believed some one ought to do. Of course the Eskimo couldn't understand that; he thought Latham was just stealing meat."

Geoff shook his head. "Eric, I know the

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truth. He was going to make sure of saving himself—then send back help to us afterward."

Hedon was looking down at the tracks in the snow. "What I don't see," he said, "is why he kept on going in this direction after he got that hurt. He must have known he couldn't go far; yet he went on with the dogs."

"He knew he'd killed the Eskimo. He couldn't go back," Geoff said.

"No, there's something else in this," Hedon said, unsatisfied. "See, the dogs went on beyond here after he died, or before. You'd expect them to stay near here or to have turned back toward the village. Come with me, Geoff."

They left the Eskimos to watch the body and followed on the trail of the unguided sledge. Soon they saw it ahead, overturned, the dogs tangled and snarled in the harness.

"Geoff!" Eric cried, as they came up and saw the snow where the sledge was overturned. "You see, Geoff? See! That's it!"

"What?"

"Look—those other sledge marks in the snow! See, two sledges, heavy and with strong

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dogs in good shape and travelling fast. The dogs here must have winded them after Latham shot the Eskimo, and they ran on this way. So he came after them. Then he fell and they came here."

"But"—Geoff stared down at the snow, weak and trembling as he thought of the possibility of relief coming from these sledges of men, strong and travelling fast—"what do these mean?"

"We can't tell yet; but we can soon find out. We've got enough in us to catch them, Geoff! We must! They can't have gone far and we can catch them when they camp. Come! Come on!"

About the Eskimo snow huts on the ice of the long bay the hunt for seals seemed going on that day as usual. Three of the Eskimo spearmen were missing from the blocks of snow where they had sat at watch for the seals; and three of the whites who also had sentineled the animal's breathing holes were gone.

The speamen still at their work looked up often over the sea ice to the south and along the snow-covered shores; and the women came

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often out of the igloos to look for signs of the return of the men who had stolen the meat and of those who had gone after them. But the moon was beginning to sink in the sky before, far away, some one saw four men with a team of dogs and a sledge approaching. Then behind it appeared three men and another dog team and sledge; then three more men and another team.

At the sight of these alarm ran round the houses and spread to the spearmen on the ice. The Eskimos gathered before the village and, excited and watchful, waited for the sledges to draw near. Before these came close, two of the men with the first sledge ran out to one side and signalled, so that the Eskimos knew that those two were their tribesmen and that they were returning with strangers, all friendly. When a short distance off, the sledges halted and four of the men came forward to meet four from the village.

Margaret stood beside McNeal and Koehler, watching the strangers approach for the parley. During the hours since the discovery that the seal meat had been stolen and Latham

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and an Eskimo missing she had gone about confused, unable to imagine the consequences to her and to the rest of the party of what Latham had done. She could not know whether or not it might be better for Eric and her brother and the Eskimos who pursued with them to overtake Latham. During her long hours of suspense she had pictured every happening, every possible result of Latham's flight and his pursuit, except the correct one.

As the ten men came in sight she had not doubted that only four could be strangers; and of course these four must be Eskimos met by some chance. But now, as the strangers came nearer, the Eskimo standing beyond Koehler saw that two of the sledges and the manner of harnessing of two of the dog teams were strange. He uttered a cry which told the news to his tribesmen and which Koehler understood.

"That's a party of white men!" the doctor announced to Margaret and McNeal.

"White?"

The strangers came closer. "There were six strange men," Koehler made out from the

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manner of the garments. "I think they all are white!"

"Six!" the girl repeated.

She sensed that if this was so two of those who had left the village were not now returning. Where were these two men? Why had they not come back?

The four advance men from the approaching party came near enough to be better recognised. Two were strangers—white men apparently, as the Eskimo and Koehler had said; one of the other men was an Eskimo who had gone with Eric and Geoff; the fourth man was Eric.

Now Margaret saw too that her brother was with the six men who had remained behind. So Geoff and Eric both had come back with the Eskimos who went with them in pursuit of Latham. The parley with the four men from the village was short and satisfactory. Some one signalled for the rest of the strangers to approach; and Eric left the parley and came on to the group before the snow huts.

As she saw him come toward her Margaret had a strange feeling that brought back to her the dread and suspense of the moments on the

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Viborg off Mason Land as she saw the party returning from the cabin signal to the ship good news and then bad. There seemed in one instant relief and triumph in Eric's bearing, then depression or constraint.

"Koehler!" he called, addressing the man beside Margaret, though his eyes were on her, "those are men from the *Kadiack!* The ship moved farther east after I left it last fall. It's wintering a hundred miles south of here—not almost five hundred southwest! It's well supplied and all right!"

Slowly Margaret sensed the news as Eric told it. The Canadian exploration ship, having found ice conditions favourable after Eric had left the ship at the point where it had planned to winter, had moved four hundred miles farther east. Reports had reached the vessel of the desperate condition of the Eskimos, so a shore party, well supplied, was sent to search for starving people, to supply some and bring others for relief to the ship. This was the party which Eric and Geoff had met and brought with them. So every one was

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safe, that was certain. They could travel easily to the ship, which was large.

"What about Latham?" McNeal was asking. And as Margaret looked at Eric he gazed at her and still for an instant was silent.

"Then where's Latham?" McNeal insisted. "Has he gone on to the ship?"

"No," Eric shook his head. "No."

The men from the *Kadiack* now were coming up, and as Margaret saw them and heard their voices the realisation that at last she and all the rest were safe came over her for the first time. With the sense of safety came also realisation of what rescue and return home would require of her. She knew that until this moment she had held that always far before her, and during the last weeks it had seemed an outcome no longer to be feared, so unlikely had it appeared that they could return to where Latham could claim her. But now that possibility again confronted her; and for some hours Eric must have been realising it. That was what took from the triumph of his return with his news of their rescue; that kept him dumb now as McNeal reminded him of

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Latham, and made him look at her, unable to meet her eyes.

"Then what about Latham, Eric?" Koehler persisted; and he too seemed now to understand.

"He's dead, doctor," Eric said quietly to him.

"Dead?" Koehler repeated.

Margaret, dazed, seemed not to have heard the word or not to have understood it. She stared at Eric, frightened, trembling. He turned to her.

"We have brought him—his body—back on one of the sledges," he said to her; then turned back to Koehler. Simply and quietly he related what he and Geoff and the Eskimos had found. Then he turned again to Margaret.

"He saved us, Margaret," he said to her. "Whatever he tried to do, he saved us. We must remember that whenever we remember anything else about him."

"Yes, yes," she repeated. "Yes."

"I have been thinking of what my father used to say, Margaret—you know he was a missionary. He said the greatest mistake in

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the world was to look for God always to select an angel to send on an errand. Of course Latham couldn't have known about the men coming from the *Kadiack;* but do you know if he hadn't gone just when he did, and drawn us after him, those men wouldn't have found us. They were turning inshore and going back another way, and they would have missed us by five miles but for him."

Margaret gazed at him, dazed. She heard what he told her and made out the words; but after the fact of their safety only one other realisation seemed to seize her.

"He's dead, you said," she repeated.

"Yes, Margaret; he's dead."

She stared past Eric over the snow to the men and the dog teams and sledges from the *Kadiack.* "But we will be saved, all the rest of us? All the rest—that must mean you and I, too, Eric—will be saved?"

"All the rest of us are saved, Margaret."

Her eyes closed and for a minute she was unsteady. Her hand groped and caught support from Eric. As she swayed, Koehler had started to her, but now he turned away. She

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opened her eyes again and gazed at Eric and then past him. "They are still there beyond you, Eric? I mean the men who have come and saved us. They are still there, the men who will take us home?"

"They are still there, Margaret."

"And you—you, Eric, Eric—you are still here with me! I still have you and we are saved? We—you and I—are going home now?"

"Yes, Margaret," he said to her gently. "Yes; we are going home."

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CHAPTER XXII

"NOTHING UNLESS GOOD"

PRICE LATHAM was dead; and of the dead, says the adage, let nothing unless good be spoken. The adage rules—and should rule—those who return from the Arctic if it rules no others. For in the Arctic men are tried as nowhere else, and under the strangest conditions. Therefore, the deeds of the dead man, as told by his companions, were made to conform more closely to the requirements of decency and of honour than to the facts.

Accordingly it has been related in those records read by slippered people warm between their radiators and blazing log fires that Price Latham, the sportsman who led the *Viborg* party into the North, gave his life in a desperate attempt to reach the Canadian exploration ship *Kadiack* to bring relief to his starving companions. He died of exposure and exhaustion after suffering an accident. It added to

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his honour, rather than detracted from it, that when he set out on his lonely journey he must have supposed the ship to be many hundreds of miles away.

The news of Price Latham's death and the safety of the rest of the *Viborg* party, together with the news of the death of Ian Thomas and the return of Hedon, were telegraphed from Alaska early in August, when the *Kadiack,* with Hedon and the seven from the *Viborg,* reached Nome, after having been freed from the ice below Victoria Island in June.

Before the end of August, therefore, Geoff and his sister reached home; Eric came with them. Since Geoff and Margaret had given up their apartment before leaving for the *Viborg,* they now went to Mrs. Thomas' where Eric was invited also. He delayed there long enough to relate to Mrs. Thomas what he could of her husband's last year; then Eric went east to report to the society which had sent him to the Arctic. Margaret remained at the Thomas home. There she received Eric's telegram from Washington telling her of his appointment to a permanent position on the

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staff of the Smithsonian Institution with a salary which would be more than Margaret and he would need; and immediately after sending his news, he returned to her.

So in the same room in which he and Margaret met, they were married. On the days after the wedding, which was with few witnesses besides Koehler and McNeal and Brunton, Geoff moved down to the club to his rooms there. The suite assigned him was the one which, till the year before, had been Price Latham's; and after moving in Geoff lay in the window seat thinking of himself as he was the last time he lounged there and as he was now.

The newspapers were brought to his door and idly he opened them. Margaret's marriage, of course, had given the papers opportunity to review the stories of the *Aurora* and the *Viborg*. Besides the large picture of Margaret there was a small sketch of Hedon and a list of his explorations and scientific achievements. Mention was also made of new evidence found by him that descendants of the lost Greenland people still survive among the Es-

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kimo tribes of the American Arctic, as other explorers had suggested.

However, he was entirely overshadowed on the page by reviews of the doings of Price Latham—his polo, motoring, golf and racket championships and records; his hunts after big game; finally his noble death under desperate conditions which daunted his companions long accustomed to the Arctic.

The tone of the newspapers was the same as the tone of the friends who had spoken to Geoff of his sister's wedding. It implied that Margaret could not have known her mind when, before going into the Arctic, she had preferred Hedon to Latham. Further it implied that Margaret must have found out her mistake too late, when there had been nothing for her to do but to marry Hedon.

Geoff crumpled up the papers and threw them on the floor. He looked at his watch and hurried out of the club and down to the railroad station. That afternoon Margaret and Eric were setting off for their honeymoon on Eric's assignment from the Smithsonian Institution to travel through China and Tibet.

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Geoff found them and said his hearty good-byes to Eric; and then he took his sister aside.

"Meg," he said, "what I want you to tell me is this: How did you know the difference between Price and Eric before we went into the Arctic?"

"You'll know," his sister said, "when the time comes for you to decide between girls."

He bent and kissed her. "Tell you one thing. If I'm doubtful, I don't marry till the girl goes with me into the Arctic. Good-bye, Meg! Good-bye, Eric, old fellow! Good-bye, both of you together!"

THE END

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